



Christian Courier



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ART WORK BY MY LINH LAM, FORMERLY FROM VIETNAM, STUDENT AT THE KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, EDMONTON



Not by degrees

Awareness of God does not come by degrees: from timidity to intellectual temerity;
from guesswork, reluctance, to certainty; it is not a decision reached at the crossroads of doubt.
It comes when, drifting in the wilderness, having gone astray, we suddenly behold
the immutable polar star.
Out of endless anxiety, out of denial and despair, the soul bursts out in speechless crying.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*.

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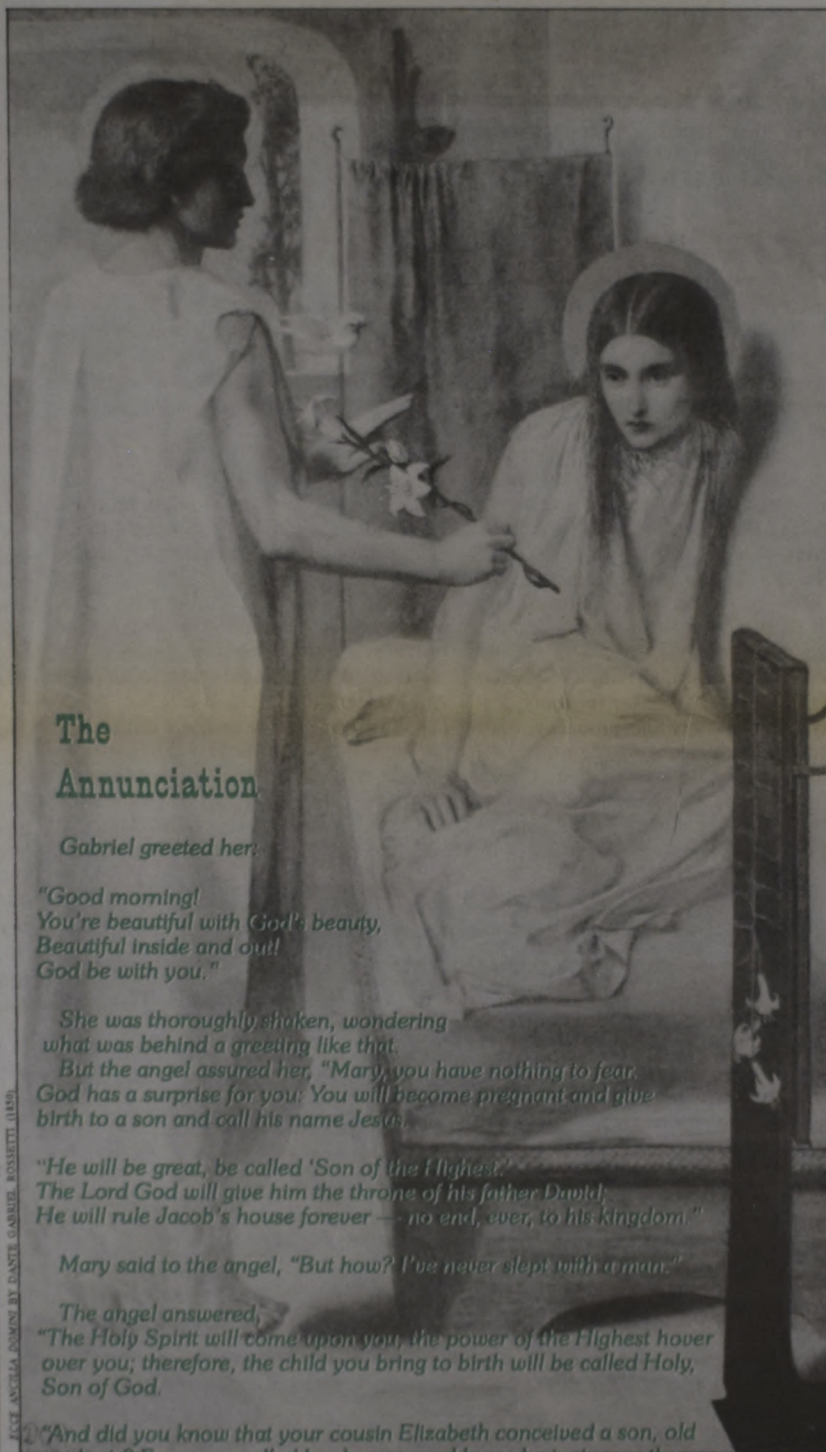
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Mary: teenager elect



The Annunciation

Gabriel greeted her:

*"Good morning!
You're beautiful with God's beauty,
Beautiful inside and out!
God be with you."*

*She was thoroughly shaken, wondering
what was behind a greeting like that.*

*But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear.
The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.
God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give
birth to a son and call his name Jesus."*

*"He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.'
The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.
He will rule Jacob's house forever — no end, ever, to his kingdom."*

Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."

*The angel answered,
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you; the power of the Highest hover
over you; therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy,
Son of God."*

*"And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old
as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months
pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."*

*And Mary said,
"Yes, I see it all now; I'm the Lord's maiden, ready to serve.
Let it be with me just as you say."*

Then the angel left her.

(Luke 1:26-38 from The Message).

George VanderVelde

God delights in pulling surprises. The Jewish people expected the Messiah to burst on the scene full-blown — straight from heaven, as it were — a strong strapping leader. But the Savior comes in embryo. The spotlight falls for a short while on a young girl. Choosing to be present to us in a truly human Jesus, God first chooses a young girl. She is God's teenager elect.

Actually, we should expect nothing but surprises from God. He's been at it so long. After all, Israel was hardly a choice nation, but it became God's nation of choice. Before that, Esau seemed to be the choice specimen; but God elects devious Jacob. And who would have expected little brother David to be the King of choice? Or to go back to the story whose echoes reverberate in what happens to Mary, who would have expected that God would choose Israel's first judge to be born of Hannah, a barren woman, advanced in years? If there's any clue to God's electing ways, it is to expect the unexpected.

To have to expect God's surprise is disturbing. He constantly upsets our patterns tried and true. And yet God's surprises don't come as a havoc-packed whirlwind. Look at Mary. The news must have totally thrown her. To be told by a messenger from God that she'll soon be pregnant and that her fiancé will have nothing to do with it — that would have been quite enough for her to wonder whether she is losing her mind. But then to hear that this bizarre news would be world news, good news for all nations and peoples — that would make her want to run and hide.

Active engagement

Though the message must have been mindboggling to Mary, it doesn't paralyze her. She doesn't even fall face-first to the ground as did Isaiah. God engages Mary as a partner. She doesn't simply capitulate. It takes some doing before she says, "So let it be." Her initial reaction is "Wait-wait-wait. Not so fast. You're telling me I'm going to have a baby? But I've never slept with a man!"

Strikingly, the messenger's response is anything but a quick dismissal. The angel does not put her in her place: "How dare you ask questions?" No, the angel goes to considerable length to respond to Mary's questions. The messenger elaborates on the "how" of the incredible news. Moreover, he enters even further into her question by providing a kind of a stepping stone to faith. The messenger points out that God has opened the barren womb of her elderly cousin, Elizabeth. "God has done it again," Mary, "and is doing it again, pulling his surprises." God places

Mary in the line of Abraham, Moses, Sarah and Hannah. Confronted with God's surprises, none of them simply rolls over. They engage God in discussion, debate-argument, even. God does not put Mary "in her place." God places her in the line of those renowned for-bears.

There's something feisty about this teenager elect. Maybe God's electing ways are meant to elicit spunk. God seems to like feisty partner-servants. Mary is hardly a maiden "meek and mild."

Clearly a portrayal of Mary as a passive instrument in God's hand is false. To be sure, she "submits" to God's will and God's way. But her "fiat," her "let it be with me just as you say," indicates her active engagement.

In fact, the first part of her response, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord," places her in the company of the great prophets. These words pick up Moses' response to the voice from the burning bush and Isaiah's response to the commissioning vision: "Here am I, send me."

Divine shake-up

On her visit to Elizabeth, Mary dons the prophet's mantle when she sings her robust song. Nothing sentimental here, nothing "spiritual," if the term refers to a strictly inner relationship between God and the human soul. Her song is at once highly personal and highly political.

What God has done in her is a picture of what God does on the political stage. The great and glorious God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Sublime and Holy One, apparently delights in choosing an insignificant teenager. God seems to relish revolution, turning the tables, bringing down the exalted and exalting the underlings. God turns away the rich and feeds the hungry. The child in her womb is a threat to all who are secure in their power and status, to all who are comfortable. As Simeon prophesies later, the demonstration of God's presence in Jesus summons powerful forces of resistance. And the prophet Mary announces a divine shake-up.

The great difference between the old-time prophets and Mary is that she is not sent. She is not commissioned on a mission of her own. Rather she is to give birth to and to nurture the Supremely Sent One, to deliver the Deliverer. As a result, her role is almost furtive. In these birth narratives, the spotlight lingers on her for a brief moment. Later, when she re-appears during Jesus' public ministry, she is often seen as one of the slow-learning disciples rather than as a visionary prophet. Her child becomes her teacher: "Did you not know that my Father's business is my calling?" Or when she tries to assert her parental role to stop Jesus from

making a fool of himself, Jesus repudiates the claim: "Who is my... mother...?" Mary's role in the Gospel is precisely that stated in her prophetic song. It is in her lowly status that she is to magnify the Lord.

Don't sideline her

The emphasis on Mary's secondary role in relation to her Son, though entirely correct, readily becomes an excuse for sidelining her. The Reformers unwittingly contributed to this minimalization by their much-needed attempt to reject a deformation. Luther and Calvin rightly opposed the elevation of Mary to such heights that she tended to eclipse rather than to illuminate the Christ. Accordingly, they strongly protested the practice of involving Mary to intercede on the believers' behalf.

Their protest against elevation, however, did not mean the elimination of Mary from Christian devotion. Luther wrote a substantial commentary on Mary's song. In effect, Luther insisted that we are responsible for fulfilling part of her song, namely the prophecy, "All generations shall bless me." Luther emphasizes the strong sense of the Greek word for "bless." This means, he says, that such blessing must be done "with all one's strength and with downright sin-

cerity, when the heart, moved by her low estate and God's gracious regard of her, ...rejoices in God and says or thinks with all its heart, 'O thou blessed Virgin Mary!'"

Calvin, similarly, is not afraid of calling for praise of Mary: "Let us learn to praise the holy Virgin. But how? By going along with the Holy Spirit, and then there will be true praises!" Going along with the Spirit means for Calvin that the focus is not Mary as such, but Mary the believer. Calvin calls on believers to follow Mary in her holy life, her faith, her obedience, her thanksgiving, her witness to Christ.

What becomes of this praise of Mary in Reformed circles? It is ironic that when Mary is held up for admiration and emulation, she quickly gets caught in the candy-floss web of sentimentality that is spun around the Baby Jesus in our Christmas celebration. Along with Jesus, Mary is domesticated. Her *magnificat*, bristling with liberating power, is remixed so as to mute its revolutionary strains. Her "low estate," which refers to her low social status, is transformed into an inner attitude of modest submission, a servile passivity. This Scripture-twisting may spring from the fear that focusing on her "fiat" opens the door to the idea that we "co-operate" in our own salvation.

But Mary did truly co-operate in God's great act of redemption. Meditating on Mary can provide a strong antidote to our tendency of thinking that we make God great by making Mary small; that we can bless the Creator when we belittle his creature; that we magnify the Redeemer when we minimize our role as imagebearers. It is precisely by heeding the Reformers' warning against an undue exaltation of Mary that we glimpse something of the wonder of God's dealing, not only *with* Mary, but also *through* Mary, fully involving Mary.

'O, you blessed Virgin!'

What would it take for us to fulfill the prophecy that *all* — even Calvinist — generations will call Mary blessed? What would it take to follow Luther's advice to delight in God and say with gusto, "O, you blessed Virgin Mary!" Perhaps we could get closer to the mystery of our Teenager Elect by sponsoring a Marian poetry contest. To prime the pump, we may want to ponder some lines from a poem by the Anglican priest, John Donne:

*Ere by the spheres time was created,
thou wast in his mind,
who is thy son, and brother,
Whom thou conceiv'st, conceived; yea
thou art now
Thy Maker's maker, and
thy father's mother,
Thou' hast light in dark; and shutt'st in
little room,
Immensely cloistered in thy dear womb.*

Note: For much of the material in the above meditation I am deeply indebted to the fascinating study by George Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of Mary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996). Except for the Scripture passages, the quotations are taken from this work.

Mary's Song (Magnificat)

*"I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened —
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies,
piled them high.*

*It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now."*

(Luke 1:46-55 from *The Message*).



George VanderVelde is senior member in theology at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto.

Christmas Editorial

Baby Jesus brings a peace that unites and separates



round Christmas time there's a lot of talk about peace. Politicians talk about peace — meaning the absence of civil war, because at this time there is no international war going on. Radios and mall speakers blare out the message: "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men." The Pope often has a message of peace. Billy Graham will be presenting the ultimate "peace plan" to the world throughout December.

Why this preoccupation with peace? Because a little child was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago?

Before we answer that with a resounding Yes, let's remember what that Child said when he had turned 30-something: "Do not suppose that I

have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). In Luke 12:51, a similar passage reads "division" instead of "sword". So Sweet Baby Jesus came to bring a sword of division into this world. I don't recall too many Christmas hymns expounding that message.

Reconciliation with God

But Billy Graham insists on presenting the world with the ultimate peace plan. And Billy Graham is a man of God. He knows what the angels meant when they sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people on whom his favor rests." You can trust Billy Graham and the Pope not to confuse God's peace plan with the world's view of peace.

The peace that Baby Jesus brought is first of all peace with God. Do you mean to say that without this peace there's war between God and humanity? Is there a push on in Bethlehem for an armistice? Yes, that's what the angels had in mind. Humanity is at war with God. God himself hates war, but the invasion of an evil empire into the good creation forced him to fight back. At the same time, God offers a way out of that warfare on the only terms that can bring shalom back to this world: reconciliation with him and his good creation.

That's why the peace on earth promised by the angels is for men and women "on whom his favor rests." It's not an unconditional offer of peace for all and sundry. People must be reconciled to God first before they can enjoy peace within themselves and with each other.

Christ guides our feet

The Apostle Paul writes that Jesus Christ himself is our peace, who has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and gentile. But that wall of hostility can come down only when people are reconciled to God through the cross. "God reconciled the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them," writes Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19.

So lest we think that Christmas is about the United Nations providing military or humanitarian aid in Rwanda and Zaire, we do well to understand that the angels' message about peace on earth is channeled through the life and body of Jesus Christ. From reconciliation with God, peace in Rwanda and Zaire can flow, but not the other way around. Just like a disease can be cured only from within and not by treating the symptoms.

With this biblical understanding we can freely emphasize that Christmas is about peace on earth. Priest Zechariah saw this clearly when he sang about the rising sun coming to us from heaven "to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

That's a matter of Christ entering the human heart to direct our feet into the path of peace. This path of peace leads to peace with ourselves, with our spouses, with our children, with our neighbors and with our enemies. This path of peace can translate into forgiveness by the Tutsis of the Hutus who killed their relatives and vice versa, without pushing aside demands for justice.

Some walls remain

But we must realize that pursuing the path of peace separates us from those who want to stay on the warpath. The path of peace is threatening to those who seek refuge in fear and hatred. Following the Prince of Peace means surrendering the principles of war: revenge, power, bitterness, hatred, first-strike security and self-directed desires. No one who wants to hold on to these principles will be charmed by the sweet song of angels to step onto the path of peace.

Mary had it right when she sang: "He [the Mighty One who has impregnated her] has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts." No sleep in heavenly peace here. The salvation that Christ brings is the "salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us," according to Zechariah.

When you think about it, Christmas is not a feast that the world can or should celebrate. Let it celebrate winter solstice or winter carnival with Bonhomme, but let it stay away from the manger, unless it is to adore Christ the Lord.

Increase of his government

But let us who once walked in darkness and who have seen a great light celebrate the birth of a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And let those who still walk in darkness also come into the light. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.... Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6).

Notice how the government and the peace increase together. Christ's rule sets the parameters for the peaceable kingdom. Wherever people bow their knees before God and obey him, only *there* will peace flow. Beyond that, there is no peace, only truces and lulls in the fighting.

The birth in Bethlehem was a military operation. Do you see that sword flashing over the manger? Do you hear that baby cry out for justice and mercy? Do you see the scepter in his hand and the crown on his head? If you do, you can sing from the heart:

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
let earth receive her king....*

How can we approach the manger with anything else but obeisance, deference and homage?
BW

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Charitable status granted to new publisher of CC

Bert Witvoet

ST. CATHARINES, Ont. — The staff and directors of *Christian Courier* finally got what they were hoping and praying for: charitable status for their new publishing company.

Up till now, CC has been published by Calvinist Contact Publishing Ltd., a private company. But this will soon change. A newly formed charitable organization called Reformed Faith Witness (RFW) will take over the publishing task on January 1, 1997.

Since this organization was recently approved for tax-exempt status as a registered charity under the *Income Tax Act*, effective retroactively from Aug. 1, 1996, it will be able to receive donations and issue tax receipts.

Changing course

The change of ownership from a private publishing company to a charitable religious corporation will mean that *Christian Courier* will operate as a Christian ministry, says general manager Stan de Jong.

The change of ownership will not affect the actual running of the paper, nor the quality of the content, he insists.

Last year, CC prematurely announced itself as a non-profit, charitable organization under the name Friends of Christian

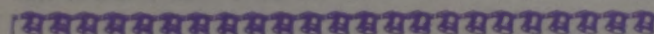
Media. However, Revenue Canada subsequently turned down its request, since the application for charitable status had been made under the heading of education. This year's application under "religion" was successful.

The objects of Reformed Faith Witness are summarized in the following statement: "To preach, teach, promote, disseminate, advance, demonstrate, encourage and implement the gospel of Jesus Christ and the related truths of the Holy Bible through a ministry of communicating biblical perspectives on current and world events in accordance with Reformed traditions."

Members and directors of Reformed Faith Witness are

required to subscribe to a "statement of faith" which focuses on "a triune God who claims obedience from all people in all areas of life, and who enables us to work out our redemption through the work of the Holy Spirit, giving direction through his Word, the Bible."

"We firmly believe *Christian Courier* needs charitable status in order to guarantee a successful journey into the next 50 years of publishing," says de Jong. He is hoping that members of the Reformed community will begin forwarding donations before December 31 of this year. "These donations will be used first of all to offset the legal expenses we have incurred to date," he says.



*May the joy of
Christmas fill your
heart with peace and love*



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COUPON

Christmas greetings from CC's news correspondents



I wish CC readers and staff a joyful Christmas season with family and friends.

James Kwantes
Abbotsford, B.C.

Let your Christmas celebrations give you a new peace and a fresh commitment to Christ's service.

Bob VanderVennen
Toronto



May you have a joyful Christmas celebrating God's gift of love.

Cindy Bruin
Calgary

Ours is a God who provides for and blesses all his children wherever they may be; blessings all yours and ten thousand more.

Jeff Hoogendoorn
Victoria, B.C.



May this blessed season remind us all that "the joy of the Lord is our strength" (Neh. 8:10).

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The Staff of Christian Courier

wishes you and yours a Christmas of quiet blessedness and spiritual rejuvenation which will linger long into the New Year.

*O Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
dispel in glorious splendor the darkness everywhere;
true man, yet very God, from sin and death now save us,
and share our every load.*

Text by Friedrich Layritz, Stanza 3: "Lo, How a Rose."



The peace of God be with you throughout the year.

Jane Ouwehand
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St. Nicholas' revenge

Lini Richarda Grol

One of the most exciting events for us student nurses in the Netherlands was the St. Nicholas' Eve surprise party. During November we closely watched our friends and foes, taking notes for the doggerel we would write to accompany our secret St. Nicholas gifts.

Our wages, and consequently our gifts, were small, and mostly handmade. All year round, but especially in the fall, we tried to create something worthwhile out of scraps of material or leftover yarn. But more important than such a gift was the silly verse that went with it. The verses gave us a chance to mock or rebuke someone without them ever knowing from whom these lyric admonitions came. It was tradition to sign all verses, *Santa*, giving the noble old Saint the blame for the friendly or not so friendly ribbing in our witty or down right catty verses.

No, we were not saints, though some claimed we were angels of mercy. It was all good fun. On such days there was lots of secret laughter in the nurses residence as well as on the wards, for some of our patients and older staff shared our secret jokes and offered advice.

Versifier for hire

Some nurses had trouble composing even one passable verse, and many leaned on me to compose their "masterpieces." They would provide me with the noble or nasty details from which I would concoct a four-to six-line verse which they would have to rewrite. But mostly they simply used my scribbles to hide even more of their true identity. Some were just itching to tell someone off.

In the days before the 5th of December I had little rest. They'd come to me anytime, anywhere with their request for verses. The housemother was kept busy storing our parcels in the recreation room, to which she alone held the key. We lived in excited suspense.

Then on the Eve of St. Nicholas Day we all tramped into that room, where large



tables were set out with our parcels. Dutifully we sang while Saint Nick and Black Peter made their entrance. Then Peter would haphazardly take one of the parcels from a table and call the recipient before the Saint.

"On your knees," he'd shout, "and read your verse." It would be embarrassing if some not-so-secret bad habits were loudly proclaimed by the poor sinner. There would be chuckles and cheers, and screams of laughter as these verses were read.

To be sure, it was very amusing — that is, if it was someone else. But luckily few letters were really nasty.

Some young women were ingenious in designing a complex wrapping. To make it more fun they would tuck a tiny gift in ever bigger boxes, accompanied with several witty or rebuking verses.

On such evenings, Cupid, too, worked overtime and had his helpers. Carry, one of my friends, was in love with shy Anton, our pharmacist. He hard-

ly dared talk to any of us young nurses. Poor Carry. We'd watch them ogling each other in silence. We had seen them blush and sigh, too much in love to speak to each other. Seeing their desperately reticent love, we just had to do something.

While on holidays in Paris Anton had sent a card to the staff. That card had gone from

...This silly girl had too good an appetite, laughed too much and too loud, was impatient, a practical joker and didn't seem to take life seriously at all...

hand to hand and somehow had ended up with Carry, who treasured it.

Anton was the only person we knew who had travelled to Paris. That St. Nicholas Eve, Carry got a prettily wrapped, exclusive box of French soap (which one

of us had donated) with a heart-rending love poem, signed by the good Saint.

As proud "godmothers" we watched Carry unwrap this parcel. She concluded that the gift and verse came from her shy Anton. She ran to him and, before he realized it, her arms were around him as, tearfully happy, she cried, "Thank you Anton, for the ever-so-sweet verse and the exquisite French soap."

Shy but sly Anton didn't question this gift nor her action. He responded wholeheartedly to her kiss right before our eyes. We smiled at each other when we saw them walk away with their arms around each other. Carry never knew what we had done, and Anton obviously never told her. They wed and lived happily as every love story ends.

One year I had been beleaguered with requests for verses and I had penned them for days on end. Practice makes perfect. I reamed and rhymed them off for all and sundry.

My best friend, Anne, more generous than anyone I knew, always had a long list of friends for whom I had to rhyme. The details were always rather mild — except that one time.

The magnum opus

Anne was a sweet and very serious nurse, and I could see that one girl was a pain in the neck for my dear friend. This silly girl had too good an appetite, laughed too much and too loud, was impatient, a practical joker and didn't seem to take life seriously at all.

So I gave that verse all I could. When I proudly showed it to Anne she cried, "Oh dear, it's so long! And now I have to rewrite it!" I nodded and said with a grim satisfaction: "My best. The longest and nastiest I've ever written for you. She looked worried when she read it and said gently, "You shouldn't have made it that long, nor so harsh." Recklessly I said, "Leave it as it is. Don't even rewrite it. She won't know who or what hit her." As always I had signed it with a flourish: *Santa*.

Anne frowned.

"Don't look like that," I said. "If she has a sense of humor she'll take it in good cheer. If not, she won't know who did this to her."

A helping of humble pie

With an unhappy shrug Anne took her stack of verses and went off to wrap presents for all her friends.

I was pleased with myself, and wished I knew who it was I had mocked so decisively in verse. I would like to have seen that silly girl's face when she read my verse.

That night, as I staggered exhausted from the St. Nick party to my room, I found on my bed a bottle of French perfume and under it the longest and nastiest verse I had ever written.

Lini Grol is a freelance writer and scissor-art artist who lives in Holland Chr. Homes, Brampton, Ont.

Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year



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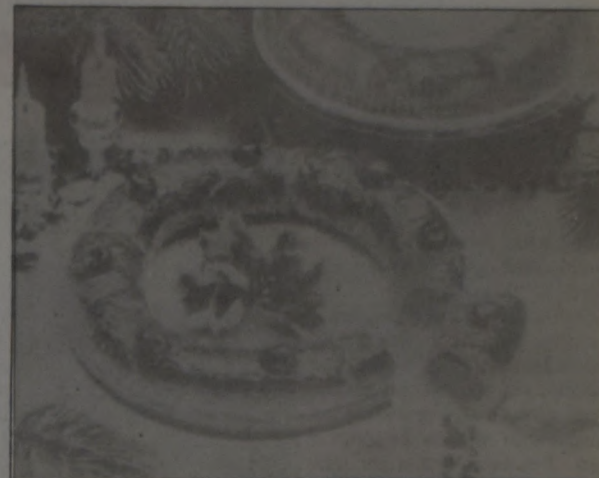
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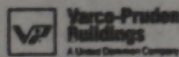
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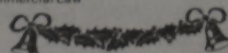
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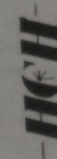


Season's Greetings

*Friends, relatives, sons and daughters,
volunteers, nurses, staff and doctors,
Ministers, deacons, elders and investors,
directors, officials, testators and
bequestors.*

May the peace of Christmas be in your heart this
season and throughout the New Year.

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*We wish
you a very
blessed
Christmas
and a
prosperous
New Year*

Jen Vanderbeek

It was the last day of school before the Christmas break. At the bus stop, Tasia picked a handful of holly branches. The sound of the mid-morning bell at recess time hurried the other fourth graders outside to the playground. Tasia stayed behind. Smiling shyly she held the fist full of stems up to Miss Shand's surprised face.



At Northfield Christian Academy the anticipation level seemed electric as the audience buzzed and hummed. After weeks of rehearsals the annual Christmas pageant was about to begin. All the costumes were pressed. The auditorium sparkled brightly with holly wreaths and bows and colorful velvet ribbons. An eleven-foot pine scented the air, its tiny white lights twinkling softly.

Backstage, the children shuffled about excitedly. The sound man nodded to the young woman at lighting. Nervously the young pianist scanned the rows of faces looking for her parents. Seventeen minutes before showtime and the house was almost packed.

Every year the pageant drew a larger crowd. This year, with a new choir director and a professional actor giving tips on elocution and voice projection, things looked better than ever. The committee had decided on two performances this year, and the sale of the videos was predicted to be even better than last year.

The thick velvet curtain parted slightly as anxious third graders took turns peeking out at the crowd. Their teacher bustled through the flock adjusting halos and straightening wings. The tinsel and sparkles shimmered and trembled in expectation.



"Here, Miss Shand," Tasia spoke softly. "These are for you."

From the back of the class-

Your gifts are precious to me



room, Maryanna's boots stomped loudly towards Miss Shand's big desk.

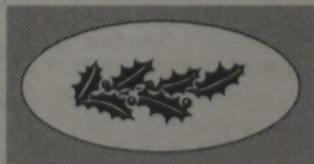
The gym floor at East Lake Christian School was covered with a rubber carpet to keep the chairs from scratching the finish. Though the program was set to begin in just eight minutes, there were still plenty of empty seats.

Along the back wall a mural painted by the youngest students displayed a collection of festive decorations in red, white and green. Frosty the Snowman smiled down on Baby Jesus in the manger and a reindeer-drawn sleigh flew high overhead. White snowflakes and bright yellow Bethlehem stars spotted the length of the newsprint mural. As an extra decoration someone had tossed a strand of imitation pine bough over the basketball hoop.

Parents and other spectators huddled near the door. The back four rows were filling slowly. A young woman hissed and waved at two small children who were shouting and jumping off the low platform set up at the front of the gym.

The huge silk poinsettia petals bounced as Maryanna clomped to a stop.

"My Mother bought this bouquet at the store and it's for you, Miss Shand," Maryanna announced to her teacher.



On cue the lights in the Northfield auditorium dimmed. The pianist launched into the opening number as the two long

rows of choir members marched, singing, down the aisles, their candles glowing warmly. Youth Pastor Jim cleared his throat before the opening prayer. The audience watched spell bound and quiet for the next 90 minutes as the children sang and spoke the story of Christmas.

The new choir robes swayed as the children flawlessly sang the difficult anthem. The kindergartners bared and wagged their wooly tails, eliciting oohs and aahs from the audience. Every class told another part of the story in well-rehearsed order. The children who had extra musical or dance lessons displayed their talents in solos that were worked into the program.



Maryanna shook the bouquet at Tasia. "These are nicer than those," she said. Then she flapped the flowers onto the desk, turned on her heel and headed for the hallway.

The gym echoed with the shrill music of the tape deck. Mr. Terris, the principal of East Lake, stood at the microphone welcoming the parents, relatives and friends. His bright red cheeks bobbed up and down as he spoke. The sound system crackled and squawked, forcing him to shout.

"Lord God," Mr. Terris prayed, "bless us tonight as we gather here, and may this evening's offerings of story and song presented by these children bring you glory and joy."

Moments later, a single spot light revealed a young boy standing alone on the platform. "My poem is called 'Gifts You Can't Wrap' and I wrote it myself," Shawn said, speaking too quietly into the microphone. Shawn's teacher crouched before him and smilingly encouraged him to start again. Shawn took a deep breath, looked at the darkened silhouettes of the crowd before him and began to read again. Clear and loud the words sailed through the darkness. When he was done Shawn smiled victoriously as the crowd applauded in surprised appreciation.

The fifth grade class moved onto the platform arranging themselves in three rows. The

music teacher adjusted the tape deck and "Hark the Herald Angels" burst loudly from the machine. The children, hands over their ears, giggled as the teacher pressed the off button. With a shrug and a sideways grin at the crowd, she reset the tape to start again. This time the children bounded and sang enthusiastically through all three verses. The crowd hesitantly clapped along. In the aisles three toddlers danced and jumped and hooted with the music.

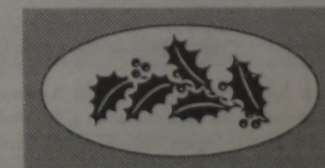
Each class was given a chance to participate in the program. Every child with a desire or an idea for something to perform was considered and encouraged. The program unfolded with more than a few last-minute changes.

"Maryanna, please come here," Miss Shand called.

At Northfield Christian Academy the cheerful crowd scattered, carrying with them the simmering glow of the evening. The auditorium walls echoed in silence. One of the main performers had left one of her roses on stage. Empty Christmas candy wrappers dotted the red carpeted aisle.

Tasia considered the rough bundle of holly stems on Miss Shand's desk. Why had Maryanna sneered at them and called them weeds?

At East Lake Christian School the crowd lingered at the refreshment tables. In the background the tapedeck crackled out the songs while excited children dashed about laughing and chasing each other. A group of adults and children were busy stacking chairs and rolling up the rubber carpet. No one seemed in a hurry to leave.



"Tasia. Maryanna. Both of your gifts are precious to me," said Miss Shand. "I thank you both for them. The holly branches will look perfect on my kitchen table, and the poinsettias will look lovely near my front door."

Jen VanderBeek is a mother who enjoys writing. She and her pastor husband, Peter, and their five children live in Forest, Ont.

Church press quotes



Rev. Jacob Kuntz

Making Christmas a spiritual season

The Nov. 23 War Cry gives practical suggestions on how we can make the weeks of Christmas a "spiritual season." Instead of complaining about secularization we can do some positive things.

"Many Christians complain that the world has taken away the true meaning of Christmas. They carry on about materialism, they say that Christ has been removed from Christmas and replaced with an 'X.' Beyond complaining, however, many Christians are doing very little to make Christmas the spiritual season it was meant to be. They are allowing secular society to set the agenda for them.

As we stand on the threshold of Advent there are alternatives for Christians to consider. We can keep Christ as the focal point throughout the season by making Advent an adventure for ourselves and our families.

"We can begin with our decorations. Christ, and the symbols of his birth, should be at the centre of our decorations both inside and outside our homes. The manger scene is a good starting point. Don't just display it — explain it to your children and to people who visit your home. Let them interact

with the figures in the scene. Discuss its meaning.

"An Advent calendar is a good idea. There are several types, but most have windows, one to be opened on each of the 30 days leading up to Christmas, revealing some fact about Christmas or encouraging some activity. They are graded for certain ages. Make sure that you get one that is appropriate for you and your family.

"Display books about the Christ of Christmas throughout your home. Spend time each evening reading a portion from the Bible about the period before Christ's birth. Have a birthday party for Jesus.

"The world doesn't own Christmas. It can't own it without understanding what it really means. If you want to help change the world's perception of Christmas, start with your world. Make Advent a spiritual adventure for yourself and for those you love."

Stiller on the CBC

In the Nov./Dec. Faith Today editor-in-chief Brian Stiller answers the question: Is CBC really our own? — in reference to the CBC slogan "Radio to call our own."

It is our own because we pay for it and it's a link between Canadians from East to West, he says. Yet he doubts that it truly serves all Canadians. This is why:

"...Is the CBC's vision of Canada broad enough to include other points of view, which means of course broad enough to include mine? On that point the phrase 'to call our own' begins to sound like an overstatement.

"Brewing within my nation-

alist heart for years has been a profound sense that the ideological assumptions of the CBC producers invariably lead to an exclusion of points of view like mine. This sense derives not simply from my perception that producers seem always to be on the social-liberal extreme of my

'Have yourself a merry little Christmas'

"Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do" (Eccles. 9:7).

Chapter & Verse



Wayne Brouwer
Andrew Kuyvenhoven
Laura Smit
Al Wolters

This is the time of year when the ritual greetings of "How do you do?" and "Have a nice day" are replaced with the ubiquitous "Merry Christmas." I have no objection to ritualized greetings. I think they make life more civil. But this one always puzzles me a bit. Where did we get the idea that the primary emotion to associate with the celebration of Christmas is merriment?

Ought Christmas to be merry? Merriment suggests laughter, festivity, conviviality; good food, good wine and good conversation. These are all fine things for which we thank God. I hope that they characterize large portions of your life. But why should they particularly characterize Christmas?

For many people, they don't characterize Christmas at all. Few of us can live up to the expectations of an ideal family holiday, full of Dickensian jollity and merriment. Those who are alone may find Christmas depressing. Those not alone may find Christmas stressful. All of us may be frazzled by the demands of gift-giving, baking, decorating and entertaining which seem to escalate year by year. Maybe we'd all be better off if we were a bit less merry.

His primary sign is a feast

One of my favorite Christmas carols, "Let All Mortal Flesh keep Silence," expresses what it is that we celebrate in this season of the year:

*Rank on rank the host of heaven/ spreads its vanguard on the way,
as the Light of Light descendeth/ from the realms of endless day,
that the powers of hell may vanish/ as the darkness clears away.*

This is a song which never fails to make me tingle with awe and wonder. "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God" has descended in majesty to take his place among us in the form of a helpless baby. Awestruck silence, ecstatic worship, prostrate reverence — these all seem appropriate responses. But merriment? Doesn't that seem a little, well... flip? Maybe even irreverent? Shouldn't we be taking this a bit more seriously?

Surely merriment is not a sufficient response. Christmas is not just an excuse for a party. At the same time, I suspect that Jesus himself would not share my reservations about the compatibility of merriment and worship.

After all, he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, and the primary sign he has left us by which we are to remember him is a feast. Think of how a small child watches something wonderful — fireworks, or snowfall, or Christmas tree lights. Wonder, laughter, awe and applause all go naturally together. Wonder makes a merry heart possible.

Do you feel rescued?

I think the extent of our merriment may also be related to how clearly we see that we have been rescued. The powers of hell have vanished. The darkness has cleared away. God has not left us alone but has shown that he loves us, longs for us, and is eager to approve us. The burden of trying to save ourselves has been lifted. The fear of death and hell has been dispelled. Of course we should laugh and make merry, not in irreverence but in joyful relief.

So "go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart." God has come to join us in our feasting, in our parties and in our merriment. Have yourself a very merry Christmas.

Laura Smit is a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and is currently doing doctoral work in philosophical aesthetics at Boston University, Boston, Mass.

more conservative persuasions. I can handle that. Rather, my sense arises from a perception that the vision of life shared by CBC producers is shaped largely by the Enlightenment idols of individualism and technology....

"CBC producers exclude us evangelicals by their unremitting adherence to secularization. Faith — a significant factor in our history and cultural life — is preempted, shut out and displayed only at state funerals.

"...I won't be mounting any strong protest against funding cuts to the CBC. I believe that to get a hearing for our views and activities evangelicals have no option but to set up our own communications structure. We need to continue to fund our own newspapers, magazines and radio and television stations.

"Of course, doing so brings with it a danger of falling into a cultural ghetto. But we need our own means of communication in

order to relate our mutual concerns, celebrate God's work among us and learn about what is happening in various Christian communities across Canada. That communication will take place only when we build forums for it ourselves."

Jacob Kuntz is a retired Christian Reformed pastor who lives in Brampton, Ont., where he works part-time as chaplain in Holland Christian Homes.

Feature



The 'Silent Night' chapel: symbol of a Christmas tradition

Don Young

*Stille Nacht!
Heilige Nacht!*

On Christmas Eve, 1818, the voices — a male soloist with a chorus in the background — spilled out of the tiny parish church into the cold, wintry air of Oberndorf, Austria.

*Silent night!
Holy night!
All is calm; all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

Nearly 200 years ago, this song, now sung in virtually every country and every language, was first introduced. Its beginnings are as humble as the song itself.

For weeks, Josef Mohr, the curate of St. Nicholas' Church, and Franz Gruber, the church organist, had been planning to present a special midnight mass on Christmas Eve. The music for the mass had been written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a native of Salzburg, just a few miles south of Oberndorf.

On the very day of the scheduled performance, however, Mohr and Gruber inspected the church organ in dismay. Mice had chewed holes in the bellows and rendered the organ useless.

But Mohr had an idea. He had recently written a little poem about Christmas. Perhaps Gruber could set it to music in time for the evening's services.

Rejecting any hope that the organ could be repaired by evening, Gruber took Mohr's poem and began to set it to music. Gruber would accompany the tune on his guitar, Mohr would sing the simple melody and the choir would echo the last line of each stanza.

By late afternoon, Gruber's work was completed.

Mohr liked the singable tune that Gruber had created and the two performed their simple piece that evening for the villagers who gathered in the church.

'Like a pebble in a pond'

A few days after Christmas the repairman came to fix the organ. He heard of the song that Mohr and Gruber had created and asked to hear it. When he left, he took a copy of it with him.

Soon, the song had been spread throughout the countryside.

The beautiful simplicity of the text and music quickly made the song popular, not only throughout Austria but around the

world. Over the years, the tune has been altered slightly and a variety of texts have been substituted for the original ones, including these, which were popular in America around the turn of the century:

Holy Night! Peaceful Night!

*Holy night! Peaceful night!
Thro' the darkness beams a light,
Yonder where they sweet vigils keep,
O'er the Babe who in silent sleep,
Rests in heavenly peace.
Rests in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night! Holiest night!
Darkness flies and all is light!
Shepherds hear the angels sing:
Hallelujah! Hail the King!
Jesus the Savior is here!
Jesus the Savior is here!*

*Silent night! Holiest night!
Guiding Star, O lend thy light!
See the Eastern wisemen bring
Gifts and homage to our King!
Jesus the Savior is here!
Jesus the Savior is here!*

But of all the texts that have been added to Gruber's fine music, those of Curate Mohr have remained the most popular, outlasting all of the others throughout the decades.

Two simple disciples

Who were the two humble individuals that, together, created what has been called the greatest Christmas hymn of all time?

Josef Mohr, the church curate, was born in Salzburg in 1792, a year after the death of Mozart. When he collaborated on "Silent Night" with Franz Gruber, he was just 26 years old.

Mohr later became an assistant priest of a church in Wagrein, Austria, where he died on December 4, 1848, 20 days short of the 30th anniversary of "Silent Night." The song was destined to be his most lasting memorial.

Franz Gruber, the organist, composer and guitarist, was born to a family of poor weavers in Unterweizburg on November 25, 1797. The boy's early interest in music was discouraged by his father, who made his son toil at the looms throughout his younger years.

At age 28, Gruber got his first job as a schoolmaster in Oberndorf. Soon he took on the additional responsibilities of playing the organ at the local church, St. Nicholas's. When he wrote the music for "Silent Night" he had just turned 31.

Gruber out-lived Mohr by 15 years. He



People from all over the world travel to Oberndorf, Austria, each year to see the Stille Nacht Kapelle.

left Oberndorf to pursue his interest in music and became organist and choir-master at a church in nearby Hallein, where he remained until his death on June 7, 1863, at the age of 75.

During his 30 years in Hallein, Gruber also founded and directed the Hallein Choral Society, a group that subsequently gained worldwide recognition.

Back to where it all began

In 1899, St. Nicholas' Church in Oberndorf was permanently damaged in a flood, but in 1937 the people of the community erected a small chapel on the site

where the church had once stood. They called it the Stille Nacht Kapelle (Silent Night Chapel).

The chapel contains just a simple altar and six small pews. There are two small stained-glass windows — one honoring the memory of Mohr, the other honoring Gruber.

People from all over the world travel to Oberndorf each year to see the Stille Nacht Kapelle. There, in a tiny village on the banks of the Salzach River, they pay tribute to a small but significant moment in music that occurred on Christmas Eve 1818.

I.D.E.A. Ministries—1997 Programs

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Danny's Part

by
Jacoba Bos

"Miss Brown?"

Jenny Brown looked around the empty Sunday school room to where the timid voice was coming from.

"Miss Brown?" The voice was almost a whisper.

"Yes?" Jenny answered curtly to the pathetic looking girl in dirty jacket and matted hair standing in the doorway. "Can my little brother have a part in the Christmas play?" She looked expectantly at Jenny who lined up chairs and books while mentally trying to visualize the boy whose hopes were pinned on a role in the Christmas play.

"Your brother? Oh, yes, that's Danny, right? And you are...?" she stalled for time.

"Debbie Smith," the girl prompted, relieved that this well-dressed, important lady had some recollection of her obscure family. "My mom says he can be an angel or maybe..."; she shifted uneasily in her big boots, nervously twisting the dirty strings hanging from her ragged mittens. "Maybe Jesus."

Jenny smiled as she moved closer to the girl. The pungent odor of the child's unwashed body made Jenny's nose twitch.

"So your brother wants to be in the play. And what about you? Wouldn't you like to be in it also?" Jenny asked.

The girl shrugged her bony shoulders. "My mom says I'm no good for anything, so I'd best not spoil it..." Her voice faded and her eyes focused on the floor.

"I have an idea," Jenny said as she slipped on her coat. "How would you like it if I bring you home and talk to your mother?"

"I'd like that, ma'am, but I don't know if my mom's out of bed yet."

"We'll see; after all it is

eleven o'clock," Jenny said briskly. Together they crossed the empty parking lot where the strong cold wind made Debbie shiver. Jenny put her arm around the girl's shoulder.

"Do you have a warmer coat at home?"

"Oh, I don't know," Debbie said as she slipped into the car, her eyes feasting on the shiny gadgets on the dashboard. Soon a comfortable warmth enveloped the two as they travelled to the outskirts of town where drab-looking houses lined narrow streets. "So this is your street; and what number is your house?" Jenny asked. "Twelve," Debbie said hesitantly, as if she could somehow make the trip last longer.

"Here we are," Jenny stopped her car in front of a dilapidated house. An old car took up most of the driveway and a rusty barbecue stood half opened in the tiny front yard where tall weeds had fallen over each other as a reminder of summer's demise.

A pink tricycle with a wheel missing lay across the walk leading to the front door, where a gaping hole in the screen provided an easy entrance for the family cat who scaled the door in one jump.

"Sylvester, you damn cat, get off that counter or I'll kill you!" The shrill woman's voice greeted Debbie and Jenny as they made their way up the crumbling cement steps. The voice grew louder.

"No, Danny, you can't go outside. You ain't even got a decent coat. I can't help it that these rotten cabbages are taking the shirt off my back." A string of profanities directed at the government responsible for the state of affairs followed the tirade. Debbie knocked timidly

in the ensuing silence following the monologue. A dark-haired, tired looking woman opened the door.

"Mrs. Smith," Jenny ventured. "I'm Jenny Brown, your children's Sunday school teacher Debbie told me that your son..."

"Well, he ain't mine, but that's no big deal." The woman's hollow laugh ended in a hoarse cough.

"I wonder if I could talk to you about the children," Jenny said after the coughing had stopped. "May I come in?"

"Hey, why not? This place ain't exactly a palace but I can't help that." Mrs. Smith said as she led the way into the dimly lit kitchen-living room area, pushing away clothes and shoes with her bare feet. She piled dirty

dishes on the counter where the cat busied himself by licking dirty plates. At the sight of his master he ran for cover under a wobbly dresser which was partly covered by a plastic reindeer running through a field of plastic poinsettias.

A snoring sound came from the corner of the room where on an old couch a man lay sound asleep with his mouth half open. A tattooed angel on his ample chest rose with every gurgling breath.

"Ya don't have to worry none about him. He'll be sawing logs for a while," Mrs. Smith said. Then with an understanding wink to Jenny, "He worked the nightshift."

"I see," Jenny said as she sat down on the only empty chair in the room.

"Care for a coffee?" Mrs. Smith asked as she took the dark-stained mugs from the sticky table cloth. "Or a beer? Jeez, that's a joke. A straight-faced, straight-laced Sunday school teacher with a Labatt's Blue in her lilly white hands."

She laughed at her own joke, then turning to Debbie she snarled: "Didn't I tell you to do them dishes this morning? But no, little Miss Prissy is off to the holy rollers, brown-nosing her way into heaven." Debbie cringed under her glare, took off her jacket and turned on the tap.

"Mrs. Smith," Jenny's voice was firm. I already had coffee at

church, thank you, but what I came for is this: Your daughter asked if Danny could have a part in the Christmas play, but what I'd like to do..." She paused, sending an encouraging nod to Debbie who had turned around, facing Jenny expectantly. "...Is to have both children do something for the program."

"So you wan' em both? Well, I was only askin' for Doug's boy. Doug's my friend," she explained, nodding towards the couch where the man stirred in his sleep. "Danny's his boy and I kinda like the kid. Me and Doug, we wanna go away Christmas Eve, so I figger, get the kid off to a good place and me and Doug will find us some Christmas cheer." She inhaled deeply from the cigarette hanging from her bright red lips, ob-

viously satisfied with her plan of action.

"And what about Debbie?" Jenny asked.

"Oh, she ain't goin' nowhere. Naw, she can stay put. Keep the cat company, hey Sylvester?"

She picked up the cat and stroked its white chest with surprising gentleness.

"Would you let Debbie go if I picked her up with Danny for the practises and for the program?" Jenny asked while Debbie watched her mother intently, a grayish tea towel clutched in her small red hands.

"Well, I guess I can't object to that. If you're so hung up on getting both kids, then you get the pair. But hey, I can't be making those costumes or whatever it is these kids have on when they're supposed to look like an angel or one of those wise guys from far away or something."

From an adjoining room came a soft cry, followed by a coughing spell. "That'll be him now," Mrs. Smith said as she went to the bedroom, leaving Jenny alone with Debbie.

"Thanks, Miss Brown," Debbie whispered as she wiped the

table, her hand briefly touching Jenny's arm.

"So here's your actor for the Christmas show," Mrs. Smith proudly announced as she returned with Danny.

"Hello, Danny," Jenny said. A smile slowly spread across the little boy's pale face. "My teacher!" he beamed, from Sunday school!

"See!" Mrs. Smith said triumphantly. "I told ya he'd be a good one. The kid can hardly talk and he wants to be in Sunday school. If that doesn't beat all." She pushed the cat off the chair and sat down. Then noticing the tidy counter and clean kitchen sink she exclaimed, "Can you believe that! All my dishes are done. I guess you learned some good from the goody two-shoes at the church," she said in Debbie's direction.

The remaining weeks before Christmas were a constant round of activities for Jenny as she sewed angel costumes and made halos for little heads. She instructed gift-carrying wisemen to enter the scene without stumbling over their bathrobes; she directed choir practice till the kids could sing the songs in their sleep.

Debbie and Danny became an important part of her life as the two children spent many after-school hours in Jenny's apartment, with Debbie preening in front of the mirror in her angel

costume; her blond hair shiny under the sparkling halo, while Danny, dressed as a wiseman sang of the Christ Child in a clear soprano voice. "...But I give him my heart, right, Miss Brown?"

Jenny hugged the boy tight.

"Yes, Danny that's the best thing we can give Jesus. We give him our heart."

Jenny's prayers were answered in a special way when on the night before the program Mrs. Smith said to her, "Ya ain't gonna believe this, Miss Brown, but me an' Doug are coming to yer show. I says to Doug, I says, 'We wanna hear our own angel sing an' we wanna see what our little wise guy give to the Christmas baby.'"

Jacoba Bos is a long-time contributor to CC. She lives in Strathroy, Ont.



Christmas celebrations: Are we stable-ized?

Johannes DeViet

A number of years back we had visitors from across the sea: two ladies of some refinement, no longer young, city-born and -bred. For us North Americans it is almost impossible to imagine how overly civilized some Europeans can be. Please allow me a few seconds to tell you about myself in that respect.

My older siblings have told me that one day, when I was still so young that only Mom was able to understand my baby talk, I came looking for her, wailing and sobbing. When Mom finally had a chance to interpret me, it became clear that my sorrow was caused by the sight of a broken horse.

A broken horse? For the first time in my young life I had seen a horse unattached to a cart! My civilized young mind told me that a horse and a cart belonged together, so the poor horse had had his cart broken off I thought.

I could end this story at this point by telling you that my brothers and sisters laughed uncontrollably, and that they never allowed me to forget this incident, and that, since no child psychologist was available to rebuild my shattered self-esteem, I went through life an emotional cripple. This may or may not be true, but I seem well enough to continue my story.

These two city slickers had to be shown around, and it so happened that I was drafted to do so. I took them here, and I took them there, but no matter what I showed them, they had always seen it bigger, nicer, better, or more up-to-snuff somewhere else.

Struck with an inspiration

As I sat home one evening, disheartened by that day's "You should have seen the one we saw in never-never land," I suddenly had what I regarded to be an inspiration. These were city folk, weren't they? They had seen all the sights any city I knew or had heard of could possibly offer. But what about the countryside?

I looked at the clock. It was still early enough. Andy would not be in bed yet. He answered the phone on the first ring. After the usual "How are you?" and "Long-time-no-see" exchanges, I got right down to business.

Yes, Andy was still in pigs. He'd been richly blessed: five modern barns he had now, and all that state-of-the-art equipment sure made life a lot easier than it used to be. When I mentioned my two guests and a possible visit to see his operation, Andy hesitated. "You know how careful I am."

Yes, I knew; and remembered. Some few years before, a contagious swine disease had decimated his stock and almost ruined Andy financially. Ever since then he took every possible precaution: "No



"Come in and smell the roses."

admittance" signs on every barn; no visitors going from barn to barn; no children running around; a pair of coveralls, often washed, waiting in each barn.

Andy was one of those stubborn Dutchmen who would rather walk 10 miles on wooden shoes than five on rubber boots. Having five barns he would have six pairs of wooden shoes: one pair to walk from barn to barn, and one pair in

That night I had one of those very vivid dreams, almost an out-of-body experience.

each barn for exclusive use inside that barn. I used to tease him by calling his fear of contagion a paranoia.

Andy knew his Bible, too, and he tried to practice hospitality. We would be welcome, he said, if we promised not to stop at other farms before we came to his place. There we would be allowed to look through one of his barns. After that we might visit with his family.

The next morning my guests looked ready for an outing in the country: blouses and slacks instead of dresses, sun

hats, and even shoes which seemed almost sensible. I felt a bit uneasy when I introduced them to Andy. Their reserve struck me as icy compared to his ready spontaneity.

With Andy in the lead we walked toward the barn destined for our visit. I brought up the rear, quietly admiring the long, low, metal-clad barn, while Andy told how much the how-many swine living in each building ate of what every day. Andy opened the heavy "No admittance" door, and there we were, ready, as I thought, for our explorations.

We were standing in a room (somehow I don't think Andy would call it a lobby) holding some minor equipment. A chute coming down from the roof must have been connected to the silo-like structure I had seen outside. At the other end of the smallish room I saw another sturdy door, obviously leading to the space occupied by the porkers. Paint squealing coming from behind it confirmed this fact.

Andy had stepped out of his wooden shoes and was climbing into a pair of coveralls. I was looking around curiously. It had been a long time since I had been in a place like this. When I saw our guests wrinkling their noses, I sniffed the air. I detected a slight, somewhat sourish smell which I thought must be coming

from whatever ground-up meal Andy fed his pigs.

Andy, in clean coveralls now and properly shod, put his left hand on the handle of the far door; he half-turned to us and, gesturing invitingly with his right hand, said smilingly, "Come in and smell the roses." But the younger of the two women shook her head firmly. In halting English she said she had allergies. Her nose would run and her eyes would water, and she'd be sick the rest of the day. "Look, my eyes are already red, and I can feel a headache coming on."

In the car on the way back to the city I was hypocritically friendly. So much for my inspirations! I would telephone Andy later to apologize once more.

I dropped the women off at their lodgings and spent the rest of that day doing not much more than thinking of, among other things, broken horses.

A dream to ponder

That night I had one of those very vivid dreams, almost an out-of-body experience, which I have had off and on as far back as I can remember. They seem to occur more often now that I am getting older. I sometimes wonder if, just for the fun of it, I should ask one of the people who is in what is called "the helping professions" about them. I might be told that they are the aftermath of all that untreated childhood mental abuse that was dished out by my siblings.

In my dream we all, the women, Andy and I, are standing in the doorway of another barn, a stable really. There's no "lobby" here, so we can more or less see what is going on in the semi-darkness inside.

A man is standing there awkwardly, looking uneasy, almost as if he feels out of place. I can distinguish some animals: goats, I think, and some sheep; also a donkey or two, and some horses. And there, in that dark corner, what might be a cow or an ox. No pigs are within sight, but behind us, in some kind of enclosure, I have noticed some camels. They could never get through the low doorway into this stable.

Our eyes are drawn toward a buxom woman near the centre of the stable. Her arms are bare, as if she has been working with water. Now she bends over a big wooden box and when she stands straight again she holds up a tiny infant for all to see. "A perfectly normal little boy," she says. "I came out to help when I heard him cry." And, looking around her, she adds, "What a place to be born in!"

Some five or six men I had not noticed before because they were kneeling down, now straighten up to look at the baby. "Christ," one of them says, and it does not sound like swearing. "The Lord,"



The Adoration of the Shepherds, by Georges de la Tour, ca. 1643.

another one adds; then, almost in chorus they all say in awed wonder, "Just as we were told!"

"Hush!" the woman says, "You'll wake him up." She bends down over the box to put the baby back. The new mother must be in that box, too, for the woman says, "You go to sleep now. You need the rest after what you've been through." Turning to that awkward, out of place man she says, "Well, I've done all I could. You look after them now." As she walks out the door past us, I wonder, "Could she be the innkeeper's wife?"

I now suddenly become aware of a number of things at once; we are all holding our nose! The two ladies, I, and even Andy, the pig farmer. And we are not

alone; behind us, all crowding toward that small doorway, is a mass of other people. When I look at the crowd a little closer, I see that they look very much like the folks who go to our church. They, too, are holding their noses!

I release the hold on my nose for a moment. Now it becomes clear why all of us are standing there like this. The stench! The unbelievable stink! What fetid odor! No freshly diapered baby could possibly reek like this. No self-respecting animal would even dare to spread this kind of smell!

When I woke from my dream I was still holding my nose. Then, wide awake, I pondered all I had seen, and heard and smelled.

Sanitizing the Savior

Now, after some years, I still often think of that dream, especially when we are nearing Christmas. Do dreams have a meaning? The people in the Bible believed they had. Perhaps we would do well to pay a bit more attention to at least one of them.

My dream was obviously triggered by the one woman's reaction to the smell in that barn. From barn to stable is not a big step. Even the time of the year, early summer, agreed. I really did not need the arguments of a so-called Jehovah's Witness to convince me of something I have believed for a long time: that Jesus was born in late spring or early summer.

I think that the horrible smell I

dreamed of reflected my ever-growing uneasiness about what is happening to our Christmases.

Christmas needs to be stable-ized. We have been so busy romanticizing and glamorizing and sanitizing the birth of Jesus that we tend to forget that he was a real, diaper-changes-needing baby, born in a dirty, malodorous stable into a cruel world where the bloodthirstiness of king Herod's soldiers was more normal than the kindness of an innkeeper's wife.

Perhaps our churches need to be stable-ized as well. When we see those squeaky-clean, angel-like girls and the mischievous shepherd-resembling boys in church on Christmas day, we should maybe talk a few of them into smuggling some honest-to-goodness nature into our festive displays. That might just bring a whiff or two of the harsh reality of that very first Christmas into our celebrations.

The smell of my dream may also have symbolized the so easily glossed-over horror of sin: my sin, the sin of those sophisticated women, the sin of farmer Andy; Adam's sin when he tried to blame Eve; my sin when I blame my bad attitude and what I do wrong on what my siblings might have done wrong long ago. The sins and errors, petty ones and glaring ones, of all of us, young and old, rich and poor, starting with those of Adam and Eve and of all those who have lived since then, and of all who are living today. The sins also of the modern, commercialized, secularized, Santa-Clausified, de-christianized Christmases.

Those sins indeed smell to high heaven. In my dream I may have sensed that they started to gather like storm clouds around that baby who would grow up to finally carry them to Calvary's cross.

That's the paradox of Christmas:

The horror that it was necessary;

the joy and glory that it came. The stable-izing, yes; and later the cross, and the grave.

But then: the Resurrection, the Ascension.

Let's sing then, and make merry, and dance,

and give gifts, and celebrate, and be joyful;

for we were dead;

and are alive again;

we were lost,

and now we have been found.

Praise the Lord for his grace!

Johannes DeVet is retired and a member of First Christian Reformed Church in London, Ont.



*May the peace of Christ
fill your heart in this
Christmas season and throughout
the coming year.*

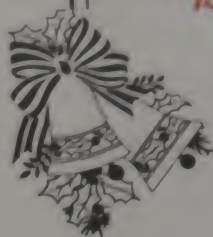
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Comment



Dear Adrian,

That schizophrenic season is here again. So many of us move toward Christmas with both anticipation and heavy reluctance. There is the busyness, of course. But there is also the nagging question of how much is a major shopping binge fueled by a society which has co-opted the church and lives by whipping up our covetousness and greed. And many family get-togethers are marred by a sense of duty, or by recent or old injuries, unspoken or unforgiven. Why not just move on to January 2?

There are ways of celebrating the birth of Jesus without getting totally caught up in the frenzy. I salute many young parents who manage to make the birth of the Infant a real event for their children. It's not easy! In our own family as our children grew up and moved away we stopped the gift exchange (I use that word deliberately) and gave each other the gift of time. For several years we rented a cottage up north for cross-country skiing. The family is getting too big for that now, but we still spend a few days together and find it a beautiful time.

When I think of past Christmases in my life, there are two that are unique. The first is the Christmas I was away from home and France, living at Cook County Hospital in Chicago. I was taking the psychiatric component of my nurses' training there. A group of us went carolling through the hospital on Christmas night. Cook County Hospital, at least in those days, was a huge, faceless dumping ground for patients who had absolutely no other resources. It was sobering to go through those wards singing Christmas carols, but rewarding, too, as many patients joined us in the songs. It was my first exposure to deep, inner-city poverty.

The second is the Christmas when our first baby was a mere 10 days old. I found myself thinking much more about the Virgin Mary and the nitty-gritty of giving birth in a stable after a long ride on a donkey. We've prettied that up too much!

But Christmas has deepened in meaning for me in the last few years. The Incarnation has meaning on so many levels, but one level that has spoken to me profoundly is the way God chose to undo the curse of male domination/female subservience found in Genesis 3. What a powerful act! — first, for God's Son to be conceived without a human father, and second, during his life to overturn all the customs and stereotypes associated with ruling leadership and the relations between men and women. What more could God possibly have done to show us what a redeemed society might look like?

Another thing I've come to appreciate in a deeper way is the story of the Wise Men. As a church doing mission work we have come to regret some of the ways in which we tried to force our Western culture on other cultures, equating Western values with the gospel. We are just now coming to appreciate that these other cultures had some things of value which should have been understood and used or transformed by the gospel story. So in that connection I find it fascinating that God accommodated himself to the worldview of these Wise Men. He didn't talk to them, as he did to the shepherds. Instead, he used their vocabulary. He put a star in the heavens that they were used to studying religiously. Isn't that amazing?

A blessed Christmas from Bob and me to you and Johanna and your family!

Mary

Two
—over—
60



Dear Mary,

I remember being part of a young family struggling to make "the birth of the Infant a real event for [our] children." For a while Johanna and I tried to maintain *Sinterklaas* on Dec. 5 as "gifts day." For a few years we gave no presents but took our children to buy toys and games during the after-Christmas-sales days of frenzy. One year we spent Christmas in San Francisco, and with our oldest three attended midnight mass at San Francisco Cathedral on Christmas Eve. Whatever we did, we never achieved unblemished happiness.

And maybe that is as it ought to be — Christmas a mixed bag, always; a sign of hope as much as a sign of embarrassment. Let's face it, in the New Testament Christ's birth is not the central "Christ event." Only two out of the four gospels mention it, and Paul is mum altogether. The cross was the early Christian symbol, not the stable's cradle. All four gospels feature Good Friday/Easter as the central Christ event, and the rest of the New Testament follows suit.

The "need" for Christmas arose only after the Roman Empire "became Christian," after Constantine, when the church was forced to cope with leftover pagan festivals such as winter solstice. The use of candles and Christmas trees as decorations, and the centrality of light in ceremonies and songs have their origin not in biblical texts and Christian liturgies, but in pagan feasts. The Christian church transformed these for its own liturgies and celebrations, much like the way you suggest the Christian church should always be respectful of the culture it tries to convert. While Easter remains the heart of church life, it can't hold a candle to Christmas in secular thinking.

Today's irony is that these liturgies and celebrations are in the process of being re-transformed for pagan use, as is obvious every day. You don't have to go to church anymore to hear Christmas carols; any shopping centre will do. My dentist drills away, chattering as he goes, while my ears catch the strains of *Silent Night* on his sound system, and there is nothing I can do.

All of us who have tried to preserve Christmas as the feast of our Lord have succeeded and failed. We have succeeded in as much as we have preserved its religious dimension — use the days to reflect on and celebrate the grace of God with the people of God, at home and in church. However, we have failed to prevent its pagan elements from reaching into our celebrations. We decorate a Christmas tree and light candles not because of Jesus' birth but because it's *zo gezellig* (cosily festively proper).

Perhaps the greatest function of Christmas is to have us live this paradox to the full: we wish to honor Christ and live in the Spirit but know that we can't manage to shut out the flesh. Then Christmas becomes a teaching that points to what Paul calls our colonists' existence. We're really never to be at home in our culture, not even in church, but we're to live life knowing that "God had planned something better for us..." (Heb. 11:40) "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for a city that is to come" (Heb. 13:14).

And then a Christmas tree, candles, a splendid meal (roast lamb at our house — another irony) are symbols not of what has been achieved, but of what is to come. And so Johanna and I wish you and Bob a blessed, mixed-up Christmas. We'll raise a glass of fine sherry with the prayer that we'll meet together in the city-to-come at the perfect feast.

Adrian

Christmas Baby



....Of course, it only took fifteen minutes for the baby to awaken because of the adults talking and laughing while they drank coffee. Add the cat and dog scavenging for food and attention to this scene and — voila — a painting by the seventeenth century Dutch artist Jan Steen....

Jan de Bree

Late December in Leechtown meant cold, damp air, little or no snow and probably more rain, although winter was near and so was Christmas. The sky was grey and the atmosphere in town was dreary. Jennifer's father nestled into a soft leather living room chair to read a book. In the dining room her mother wrapped a baby gift in Christmas paper. Jeremy, her brother, waited in front of the mute television for a toothpaste commercial to finish. In her bedroom Jennifer folded socks into her suitcase because she and her father were going to Victoria where her Aunt Marja and Uncle Joe lived. Aunt Marja was expecting a baby any day now. Jennifer's father and Aunt Marja were brother and sister. Uncle Joe, who worked in a wooden door and window plant, could not take much time off work to help Aunt Marja with the baby when it arrived because the boss said he had many doors and windows to manufacture. Therefore, Jennifer and her

father would help Aunt Marja during that busy time.

Aunt Marja would give birth to the baby at home with the help of a midwife. Uncle Joe would be there too. He and Aunt Marja had waited nine months for the baby. He would not miss that moment. A stack of cloned doors in a cold warehouse were not as cherished and precious as his new child. The boss might feel affection for those doors and windows, but Uncle Joe felt only affection for Aunt Marja and his baby. This would be their first child.

They had a dog and a cat. While Aunt Marja carried the baby in her womb, it appeared that Uncle Joe practised parenting on the dog. He fed it, walked it, played with it as if he were the father and the dog his child. Aunt Marja, a little nervous, said she hoped that he would spend as much time with his child as with the dog. He said she had nothing to fear. If that were true, the poor dog had something to fear because soon Uncle Joe would give most of

his attention to the newly born child.

Jennifer's cat, Erasmus, jumped onto her bed and into the suitcase. She lifted him out. Then the telephone squeaked in the kitchen. Jennifer ran to it. The cat followed. On the telephone was Uncle Joe who announced that he was the father of a baby girl named Natalie. Natalie was healthy, as was Aunt Marja.

As Jennifer and her father drove the road from Leechtown to Victoria, the ink-blue evening sky glittered with starry dots of light. Jennifer thought about a pioneering woman, Mrs. Morgan, who walked this way a hundred years ago from Victoria to Leechtown with a cow. Had Mrs. Morgan bought her cow around Christmas time and did the sky then look as deep as it did now? The fir trees and the outcroppings of rock were small compared to the horizonless sky. Even the mountain, the Malahat, was but a bump against the immeasurable sweep of imperial blue.

Jennifer's father drove the car confidently through the curves that twisted around and over the mountain. The last section of winding highway straightened at the Goldstream Shell service station. They had made it over the rugged terrain to arrive at the place where people lived. Jennifer felt safer. From Goldstream the drive into Victoria was an easy ten or fifteen minutes. For Jennifer the city of Victoria began not at the official boundary line but at the Tillicum Mall. There the houses crowded side by side with little space in between them. There the street lights were noticeably brighter because there were more of them, and there the thousands of small Christmas lights shone brilliantly like the light of many angels in the sky.

Jennifer always knew when she approached her aunt and uncle's home because the glowing red word that spelled Zellers on the back of the mall was her clue to their whereabouts. Aunt Marja and Uncle Joe lived there, not direct-

ly under the Zellers sign, but close to the Tillicum Mall, two or three streets over from it. Those streets slipped by like water. Before she knew it Jennifer stood at the front hugging Uncle Joe. He then took her suitcase and with the sweep of his arm waved her into the house. She had no time to congratulate him.

"Welcome," proclaimed Uncle Joe. "You made it through the rain and have come to add wind to your weather. Welcome to the windy city where we receive half as much rain as Vancouver. Good things do come out of Victoria. Mild weather is one of them."

"Yes, and also a charming new baby," added Jennifer's father.

"Of course, of course," laughed Uncle Joe. "Victoria is blessed." He paused for several seconds. "O my! What am I saying?" Then he smirked and said, "I'm blessed."

While Jennifer stood in the hallway, curious Tuffy, the dog, and Fluffy, the cat, came to her. They circled about her feet sniffing her shoes and ankles. She stroked the animals. Her father and Uncle Joe continued to talk in the open doorway. When Tuffy finished his examination of Jennifer he nudged her like a toy toward the living room. Jennifer did not object. Waiting in the hallway was dull.

In the living room the canary joined in by cheeping loudly. Jennifer laughed. Uncle Joe and her father now stood in the doorway to the living room, still talking. Jennifer wanted the two men to do something other than talk. These fellows could make coffee and serve cookies, or Uncle Joe could show off the baby and then Jennifer could give her baby present to Aunt Marja. While Jennifer looked to her father and Uncle Joe for a diversion, Tuffy looked to her for some amusement. They stood waiting and watching. Then out of the master bedroom came the midwife. Her presence reminded Uncle Joe that there was a new baby in the house. He darted over to speak with her. She said that the baby and Aunt Marja were asleep. Now Jennifer had to wait longer to visit with her aunt and her new cousin, Natalie, and she was hungry.

She walked into the kitchen. Gawking at the back door window were Grandma Myrtle, Grandpa Frank, and Gord, Uncle

Joe's brother. Grandma pointed down with her finger signalling Jennifer to unlock and open the door. She did as Grandma requested.

"Where is everyone?" asked Grandma as she stepped into the kitchen.

"They are here somewhere," answered Jennifer.

"Your father too?"

"Yes."

"We're here to see the new baby and give our presents," said Grandpa Frank.

"And I want to give my daughter a big hug," said Grandma. "Have you seen them yet, Jennifer?"

"No, Aunt Marja is sleeping," informed Jennifer. "And so is Natalie."

"Let's find Joe and have him make us coffee while we wait," said Grandpa to Gord. They left the kitchen for the living room.

Tuffy and Fluffy sniffed Grandma.

Of course, it only took fifteen minutes for the baby to awaken because of the adults talking and laughing while they drank coffee. Add the cat and the dog scavenging for food and attention to this scene and — voila — a painting by the seventeenth century Dutch artist Jan Steen. If you look carefully, you will notice a bored girl sitting in the corner, a cat on her lap. Yes, it is Jennifer.

asked her father.

"No," replied Jennifer.

"Is something else wrong, then?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" asked her father.

"I don't get to visit Aunt Marja and the baby when everybody else does."

"You'll just have to wait your turn."

"Everybody just barges in before me. I'll never get a turn. You watch. There will be more adults and I won't get in to give my present."

"There is always tomorrow."

"That's not fair. I was here

here to help."

"I'm going to ask Uncle Joe if I can visit Aunt Marja," said Jennifer.

"Just wait. He is talking to Grandma and Grandpa right now."

"Oh, Dad."

Jennifer, back in the kitchen, rummaged through the cupboards in search of food and pans. Tuffy was there to help. While she scrutinized the cupboards under the counter, she heard thumping on the back stairs. There were several people at the back door. She recognized no one. The man at the front of

chase a Polaroid camera so he could take a photograph of Natalie for them to see. They laughed.

From her place in the kitchen Jennifer listened and watched. She looked at her unopened baby present that lay on top of the television in the living room. Uncle Joe made more coffee while her father stirred the canned stew. Just then Tuffy whined and scratched at the back door. Jennifer opened the back door for the dog. Outside the air was cold and damp, but the Christmas lights on the houses were attractive. She stared for a moment until Uncle Joe said abruptly, "Close that door. You weren't born in a barn. Were you?"

Angry, Jennifer closed the back door, walked into the living room where she grabbed her gift from off the television and sneaked down the hallway to Aunt Marja's bedroom. She knocked delicately. From inside came Aunt Marja's, "Yes?" Jennifer opened the door and asked if she could enter.

"Sure you can," said Aunt Marja. "I didn't know you were here."

"I came with Dad."

Aunt Marja raised Natalie up and on to her shoulder for a burp. "So they forgot about you."

"I think it's because I'm a child,"

said Jennifer.

"I'm glad you came," said Aunt Marja. "This happy occasion is for you as well as Grandma and Grandpa."

"I brought a present for you and Natalie."

Aunt Marja fumbled at the wrapping paper with her one free hand.

"Shall I open it for you?" asked Jennifer.

"Please do," said her aunt. "It is awkward for me while I'm holding Natalie."

Jennifer was about to pick up the gift when her aunt said, "Maybe you could hold the baby

and I open the present."

"I would like that," said Jennifer as Aunt Marja handed Natalie to her.

Jennifer had just enough time to look at Natalie's face when her father came into the room.

"Here you are," said he. "You should not disturb your aunt and the baby."

"Aunt Marja said I could."

...When Grandma, Grandpa and the others finally returned from Aunt Marja's bedroom, Jennifer thought she could have her turn for a visit...



first."

"Nobody said it would be fair," answered her father.

"That stinks. I thought it was supposed to be fair. God said so, and you're supposed to make it happen. You're my father."

"I hadn't looked at it that way and I suppose there is some truth to that," said he. "Unfortunately, I possess only limited powers to influence this situation. You'll have to talk to Uncle Joe."

"He's so busy that he doesn't even make supper," said Jennifer.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes, I'm hungry."

"Let's make supper. We're

the line up said they were neighbors come to congratulate Uncle Joe. Jennifer called Uncle Joe. When he arrived, the neighbors greeted him with smiles and hugs. Each one shook his hand, wished the best for him and his family and gave him a present for the baby. Uncle Joe invited the neighbors into the living room where he promised them a cup of coffee or tea and a cookie. But he would not let them in to see the baby. He said there were too many of them and Marja needed time to rest before she could socialize with such a large crowd. A neighbor suggested that Joe should pur-

said Jennifer in self defense.

"It's okay," interjected Marja. Jennifer cooed as she stroked Natalie's cheek. Her father watched.

"Lots of people will want to hold her," said Jennifer. "And lots of people will sing songs to her."

"Yes," said Marja. "And I'll do most of the holding and singing for now."

"But I'll get a few turns; won't I Aunt Marja?" asked Jennifer.

"Of course you will."

"And now back to the kitchen, Jennifer. We have work to do. Uncle Joe has made a mess serving coffee and tea to the neighbors," said her father. "And the animals need to be fed."

Jennifer handed Natalie over to her aunt. "Thank you for letting me into your room for a visit and for letting me hold Natalie," said Jennifer.

"You're welcome Jennifer and thank you for the lovely present."

"Now I'll go to the kitchen to help father with the dishes," said Jennifer. "I'm doing this for Natalie. I am her servant, Aunt Marja."

"Someday Natalie will thank you for your work," said Aunt Marja as Jennifer and her father left the bedroom.

Jan de Bree is a writer and art buff who lives in Danvers, B.C. His daughter Josina drew the illustrations.

Feature

Leftovers

Beatrice Vandervelde

"Why are you so sad?" he asked, brown liquid eyes staring earnestly into mine.

I slump into my big chair. Of course I miss my wife, miss her terribly. Sometimes it's only a dull ache but at other times it's a sharp pain that makes me cry out and grab my gut. Why her? Why now?

The air is heavy and cloying; the house like a coffin. Even thought is stifled. Sleep, that's all I want. I shuffle my way to the bathroom, swallow a sleeping pill and go to bed. Sleep. My only comfort.

The next day is no different. As the first light dawns, I force myself through the motions. Dry cereal in the bowl — milk. I spoon the food into my mouth. I heat water in the microwave. The instant coffee I add goes yellow, as if I've added cream. I drink the lukewarm liquid; it has no taste. The dishes I've used join the other unwashed stuff in the sink.

I go next door. No idea why. Maybe it's a need to see the little fellow again, a vain effort to grasp for Jane by being near people whose life she touched. "We'll all miss our Grandma

Jane," they wrote on the sympathy card. Grandma? We don't even have *children*. I offer to watch the little boy, the little blabbermouth, while his mother goes Christmas shopping.

Within fifteen minutes they are at my door. Michael immediately takes off his boots and slips past me to walk through the house. I hear him mutter, "It's the same, it's still the same." Arriving in the kitchen, however, he pauses. A frown appears on his face. He shakes his head. Pushing a chair up to the sink, he climbs onto it and tells me, "I'm a good helper."

"Helper?" I ask in surprise. "The dishes, I can help with the dishes," he tells me earnestly. When I don't make a move, he explains, "I'm four now. I don't break things anymore." He waits expectantly.

"You want me to do those few dishes?"

"Grandma Jane doesn't like a messy kitchen."

"Grandma Jane? Who's that?"

He looks at me in surprise. Those big brown eyes again, penetrating my soul. Then he tosses his head just a little as he gives me a knowing look, smiles and whispers almost shyly, "My friend."

While I stow that answer away, I hear a sharp intake of breath. "Hey, where are her flowers?" he yells, glancing in alarm at the windowsill behind the sink. "All her pretty flowers are gone."

"Which flowers?" I ask quickly, amazed at the loud sound coming from such a little guy. "There were no flowers."

"The ones from outside. Grandma Jane said we'd bring them in and the 'd cover the whole windowsill." He looks at me in amazement. Suddenly he changes again. "Did you forget?" he asks almost sympathetically.

He's right. She always took the plants in. But since her death I've hardly been in the yard. I never thought of the plants; I've neglected even her flowers.

"Let's wash the dishes," I propose quickly. I run the water and hand him a towel. As we work side by side he regains his tongue and chatters away. When sink and counter are clear, he announces, "Snack time. You make coffee and I get a teeeeeny (he stretches the word while his eyes close and his face tilts up) bit in my milk."

"Coffee's not good for you," I

say, shaking my head.

"I know. I'll get red hair," he answers earnestly. "But just a little. Grandma Jane says I'm such a good helper I deserve a little taste."

It seems I have to make drip coffee, instant just won't do.

He sniffs the air as the liquid trickles into the pot. I'm told, "Smell the *roma*?" It counts for one, Grandma Jane says. Then

he leans back, a satisfied smile on his face.

A flood of memories washes over me — school, childhood, stories I've loved, thoughts of Jane. He moves slightly and I notice the smile has faded. In a sad little whisper he tells me, "You're not as soft."

"Not as soft?" I ask, puzzled.

"Grandma Jane was soft," he says wistfully, lightly touching



she *drinks* the second cup." I can almost hear her say it.

He points out his eyes; he leads the way to the cookies. He warns, "Maybe there won't be any. Grandma Jane's been gone a long time." Surprise, surprise, even after three months, there are still some cookies in the jar. He claps his hands, face aglow. The cookies are stale but we treat them as delicacies.

From a box in the bottom of the hall closet he chooses a favorite book, "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." We sit in the big chair to read, he on my lap. He's familiar with the book and repeats certain lines as *she* must have read them: "No, you have to go softly. Trip, trap, trip, trap," he tells me about the littlest billy goat's walk, and his head moves from side to side along his chest. Later he gets all excited. "Oh yeah! This is the good part. You have to use a really deep voice," and he sits up straight and helps me bellow the lines while his shoulders and his whole body get into the action. When the book is finished,

my bony wrist. His lips hardly move; his face has grown still, his beautiful brown eyes dull. Weightless, he climbs out of my lap, shrunken.

Suddenly he jolts upright. "Did you hear it?" he asks, his face alive with longing as he looks up at me. "Did you hear it?"

"What?" I ask.

"The cricket."

"It can't be," I say quickly. "It's winter. There's no crickets now." I hate myself for dashing his hopes.

"What's that then?" he argues, eyes shining as we hear a loud chirrup.

"A cricket?" I ask, looking at him skeptically.

"It's a leftover," he cries with glee. "It's a leftover from summer. Grandma Jane says they always try." He does a wild little dance. "A leftover, a leftover," he sings.

Instantly — faster than any sun, faster than the warmest wind, this living leftover restores our cheery mood. Michael again chatters away. "Shall we look for it?" he asks. But we



don't look for it. Instead, he takes crayons and paper out of a drawer. Biting his lips in concentration, he draws a picture.

"While you're busy, I'll get some lunch," I tell him and make my way to the kitchen. Reluctantly I check the fridge for plastic bowls and half-empty casseroles.

Aaaahhh, the smell of a good dinner cooking, especially meat — pot roast, stew, turkey; the whole house filled with tempting aromas. Jane was a great cook; she often indulged me. Since she's been gone, this fridge grows leftovers, bite-sized servings with no smell and little taste. Yet I can't seem to chuck them.

Suddenly I'm reminded of an incident: Jane checking leftovers the way I'm doing now.

"Leftovers tonight?" I asked with distaste.

"Not leftovers. Blessings," she proclaimed, a twinkle in her eye. "Blessings, because it shows we have more than enough."

I change as if stabbed.

Leftovers. It's all I've got! I want to howl.

Just then Michael skips toward me with his drawing. "It's for Grandma Jane," he tells me. "Can you bring it to her?"

"What did you tell her?" I ask, studying the page. A blue, sort of rounded square with three blobs on the bottom is sur-

rounded by strange marks and squiggles — a message. I presume.

"New flowers. See? We'll buy new flowers. I told Grandma

Jane everywhere, little gifts, unwrapped, heartwarming and healing. By the time Michael leaves, I feel the closest to Jane that I have since her death.

Suddenly I'm reminded of an incident: Jane checking leftovers the way I'm doing now. "Leftovers tonight?" I asked with distaste. "Not leftovers. Blessings," she proclaimed.

Jane, "Don't cry. We'll buy new ones." With stubby fingers he points out the flowers.

"We could, couldn't we?" I tell him. "Buy new plants, I mean. Will you help?"

The day flies by. We eat lunch. We clean up. Traces of

Finally I may be up to tackling some of those cleaning jobs — going through her clothes, her books, I may even haul out the Christmas tree.

I lean back in Jane's rocker and think about the little whirlwind who just visited. I

hear him telling me, "I'm an angel, you know." Dead serious.

"Oh?" It dropped lightly from my lips.

"That's what Grandma Jane says. I'm her little angel. But I'm a big angel now. I'm four."

I chuckle. When his Mom picked him up, he didn't linger but immediately slipped past us at the door, quick as a silvertfish. Before we knew it, he'd found a bare patch of dirt between our driveways and was gleefully musing in the mud with his boots.

I chuckle again. An angel with clay feet.

Grandma Jane.

What will my earthy angel call me?

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Music Reviews



God's Truth Abideth Still: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns Sung by Choirs and Audience

Harm Hoeve, organ; Noortje Van Middelkoop, panflute; Herman Van Vliet, organ; Bastiaan Van Vliet, french horn. Produced by Roelof A. Janssen. Neerlandia, Alta.: Church Music & Records, 1996. CD CMR 105-2; cassette: TC CMR 105-4. Tel. & fax: 403-674-3949; toll-free order no.: tel. and fax: 1-800-563-3594.

This recording contains selected stanzas of 15 Genevan psalms and two hymns sung by combined Canadian Reformed congregations and choirs in Neerlandia, Edmonton and the Fraser Valley. The metrical psalm settings used are from the Canadian Reformed Churches' *Book of Praise*.

If you know and love the Genevan psalms, this recording

is for you. If you don't know them (or think you don't like them), this recording may demonstrate to you why these psalm tunes have endured for almost 500 years.

There are exuberant psalms of praise and celebrations of God's faithfulness and justice (116, 68, 103, 132, 19, 147); and meditative psalms of confession or profession of faith (85, 139 [organ only], 16, 21, 78, 51, 91 [organ only], 73, and 15). In addition, there is a "cantata" by Jan Zwart on "A Mighty Fortress," and a hymn setting of verses from Habakkuk: "Lord, I have heard the tidings/Of thee and of thy might..."

The sturdy, rhythmic Genevan tunes capture better than virtually any other musical psalm settings, I think, the breadth of

human emotion and faith expression contained in the biblical Psalms (which were originally sung/chanted, not read). These tunes are imminently suited musical vehicles for enabling congregations to adopt as their own the Psalms' expressions of God's greatness, majesty, kindness and compassion. Thus, it's appropriate — and powerful — to hear these psalms sung in unison ("with one heart and voice") by an assembled congregation (with the addition of a massed choir singing some stanzas in harmony).

A joyful noise

These are untrained singers, and it shows. High notes are sometimes flat, the tone quality has the slightly nasal sound characteristic of untutored voices, and the English pronunciation has some of the sloppiness of every-day speech.

If you're looking for an exquisite musical experience, these things will annoy you. But if you realize that this recording is primarily an expression of faith by ordinary Reformed Christians, using a medium which has characterized Reformed worship since it began, this music will inspire you; and some of it will even thrill you.

That's not to say that the professional musicians involved could not have done a better job. Some of the organ arrangements use hackneyed chord progressions, bombastic toccata-like outbursts, amateurish, chopped staccato phrasing, and riffs at the end of psalm introductions which result in the congregation not being certain at what tempo the psalm will proceed.

The harmonies and registration (organ stops) used are often lushly Romantic (as is the use of panflute) — a style actually at odds with these straightforward, robust Genevan tunes. It's a measure of the tunes' durability, however, that such treatment doesn't wreck them. But organ settings more in keeping with the Genevan style would have been more effective.

Church Music & Records in Neerlandia is to be commended for their efforts to keep psalm-singing alive among Reformed Christians; this is but one part of that effort. Why not put on this CD (or cassette) and sing along? — in English or Dutch, it doesn't matter. This is faith-confirming stuff.

Sing to the Lord: The Children of Asaph Sing the Psalms of David on the Tunes of John Calvin

The Children of Asaph, Theresa Janssen, cond.; Noortje Van Middelkoop, panflute; Lucy Bootsma, violin; Daniel Bootsma, cello; Harm Hoeve, organ. Neerlandia, Alta.: Church Music & Records, 1996. CD CMR 104-2; cassette: TC CMR 104-4. Tel. & fax: 403-674-3949; toll-free order no.: 1-800-563-3594.

This offering and *God's Truth Abideth Still* can be seen as companion recordings. But instead of massed congregations and choirs, the psalm singers here are children: "The Children of Asaph." That highly appropriate name for a psalm-singing children's choir comes from Asaph the psalm-writer, seer and father of a long line of temple musicians in Old Testament Israel.

This CD of 13 Genevan psalms starts with a pleasing and effective rendition of Psalm 42, accompanied by strings (violin, cello), organ and panflute. The choir enunciates nicely and has a generally pleasing tone quality here.

Because this recording features the singing of a single choir, though a children's choir, it needs to be judged as a choir, not as a congregation would be; these are "performances" in a way the psalms sung on *God's Truth Abideth Still* are not.

The second track, Psalm 116, lies higher in the vocal register, causing some of the choristers to strain on the high notes (the third stanza descant is flat enough to cause the listener to wince). Nor does singing the psalm in canon (stanza 2) work well harmonically.

Flat singing is an ongoing problem (e.g., Psalm 96), as it is with so many amateur choirs of adults and children alike, and tone quality suffers at times because of forced singing, i.e., trying to sing too loud, sometimes in competition with the instruments (particularly Psalm 98).

Such problems crop up throughout the recording but they are off-set by genuinely enjoyable moments of good singing. The spirit of the children (and their director) cannot be faulted. This choir has the potential for excellence, which could be begun to be realized simply by the teaching of proper breathing technique.

Despite the musical problems there's a sweetness of spirit about this recording, and of course, the Genevan tunes they sing have stood the test of time.

Musical gifts for Christmas

by
Marian Van Til



Greatest Christmas Hits: The Philadelphia Orchestra

Eugene Ormandy, cond. Excelsior. Sony Music Special Products. BT 70003.

During Eugene Ormandy's long tenure with the Philadelphia Orchestra that ensemble came to be ranked with the best symphony orchestras in the world. Ormandy is gone but his many recordings with Philadelphia remain classics.

While the emphasis here is on the orchestra, there is some singing as well. A few secular carols are mixed with the other. For variety, the Temple University Choir sings the last stanzas of "O Come All Ye Faithful," "O Tannenbaum," and three other carols. The St. Francis De Sales Boychoir of Philadelphia sings "Away in a Manger" and "The

Little Drummer Boy." Together they sing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas."

In our era which has seen the proliferation of the kind of clear-toned small choirs and period-instrument orchestras which can authentically produce music before 1800 — and even its Christmas carols — this recording is a shameless throw-back to a more romantic time. The arrangements are lush and don't hesitate to use full orchestra, including percussion (some arrangements border on schmaltz). But needless to say, the playing is flawless. If you like large orchestras and music of the Romantic era, chances are you'll appreciate this recording. You can always supply your own texts and sing along.



An International Christmas: Favorite Carols from Many Nations



Amor Artis Chamber Choir, Johannes Somary, cond./solo organ. Grace Church Children's Choirs, Bruce McInnes, dir.; David V. Cox, organ. Excelsior Christmas Gold. Essex Entertainment Inc. EXL 4-5399

The Amor Artis Chamber Choir is another choral group which has developed a long-standing reputation for excellence. We're not told where these carols were recorded, but the depth of sound and slight echo sounds like it may have been in a large stone church rather than in a studio.

Unfortunately, neither does the skimpy information on the recording jacket give a location for the Grace Church whose children's choirs participate on "Gesu Bambino" and "The Little Drummer Boy." (Maybe it's good they can hid behind

anonymity; the only thing not musically up to snuff here is the tendency toward flat singing on what would have been an otherwise beautiful rendition of "Gesu Bambino.")

Carols from eight countries

The carols are from England, France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy, Poland and the U.S. and are sung in the languages of those countries. Some are exuberant songs of praise and excitement at Christ's birth ("Angels We Have Heard on High," "Pat-a-pan," "Adeste Fideles," "Riu, Riu Chiu," "The Snow Lay on the Ground," "Go Tell It on the Mountain"); but others mean to induce a more quiet praise and wonder.

It is interesting to note the style differences from country to country, especially in the more

contemplative carols: the sturdy, straightforward German chorales "Lo, How a Rose" (followed by Brahms's organ setting) and "Vom Himmel Hoch" (followed by a baroque organ setting by Johann Pachelbel); the stark, medieval English melancholy of the Conventry Carol (which tells of Herod's slaying of the baby boys); the forthright American lullaby "Jesus, Jesus Rest Your Head"; the haunting sweetness of the Italian "Gesu Bambino"; the lilting Polish peasant dance of "The Zither Carol."

If you know mostly English and North American carols (and perhaps some in Dutch) but would like to get to know some from other countries and Christian traditions, this recording will broaden your repertoire a little. Additional variety is provided by periodic well-placed works for solo organ, based on the carol tunes.

Holiday Greetings: A Festival of Carols With The Gregg Smith Singers & Friends



Excelsior (Christmas Gold). Essex Entertainment Inc. EXL 4-5202 (cassette); also on CD. Concept by Dieter Wilkinson. 71:08 minutes.

This recording is part of the Excelsior "Christmas Gold" series in which classic analogue recordings are digitally remastered onto tape and/or compact disc. Some in the series are made in Canada, some in the U.S. Though these are "budget recordings" the engineering is good and there's nothing cheap about the music or the performances they contain.

The Gregg Smith Singers have been a fixture on the North American musical landscape for many years. In sound and quality they are not unlike the Robert Shaw Chorale. If you

like the immediacy of sound and emotion of an unaccompanied choral singing, and the rich tone quality and depth of expression of which a good mixed voice adult choir is capable, you'll find this recording quite satisfying.

Actually, less than half of the 17 traditional carols from various countries contained here are unaccompanied. There's a great deal of variety of arrangement, including several lovely vocal solos, a few instrumental numbers, and various accompaniments: small string ensemble, a brass choir, piano, handbells or full orchestra.

The only frustrating thing about such budget recordings is that written information is at a premium. Thus the "Friends" accompanying Singers remain unnamed (they're obviously other professionals, and might be well-known professionals at that); nor are the arrangers named, nor texts or other musical information included.

A sampling of the 17 carols: "Angels from the Realms of Glory," "Joy to the World," "Away in a Manger," "O Come All Ye Faithful" (and the Latin version, "Adeste Fideles"), instrumental variations on "Good King Wenceslas," "Lo, How a Rose," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "In Dulci Jubilo," "Wassail Song," "O Holy Night."



Christmas: Favorite Carols

The Riga Boys Choir. Excelsior (Christmas Gold). Madacy Music Group Inc. P.O. Box 1445, St. Laurent, Que, H4L 4Z1. CD or 2 cassettes (EXT-4-8150).

This lovely recording contains 44 carols, some of them rare, all of them beautifully sung. The variety of style is delightful and the arrangements are inventive.

As mentioned elsewhere the Excelsior budget recordings are annoying in that they tell the listener virtually nothing about the musicians featured. Through some digging I was able to determine that this boys choir comes from the coastal town of Riga, Latvia (the Gulf of Riga is an eastern extension of the Baltic Sea). Who their conductor is remains a mystery, as do the identities of the fine arrangers, instrumentalists, organist and the organ used.

The choir, too, is a mystery: a church or community choir? My guess would be it's a church choir, probably Catholic; but that's only a guess.

The boys of the choir have the rich, mature sound reminiscent of the German and Austrian boys choirs, as opposed to the more ethereal sound which is characteristic of the English choirs. The Riga boys (and men) may not have the absolute technical and tonal perfection of the

best English choirs, yet their singing is consistently beautiful — and real. It communicates. The choir sounds committed to what it is singing about.

Also noteworthy, even remarkable, is that every song is sung in English, with only an occasional, not very perceptible accent. And virtually every word of every carol is understandable (a feat even for native English-speakers singing English). They even do a convincing rendition of the black spiritual "Mary Had a Baby."

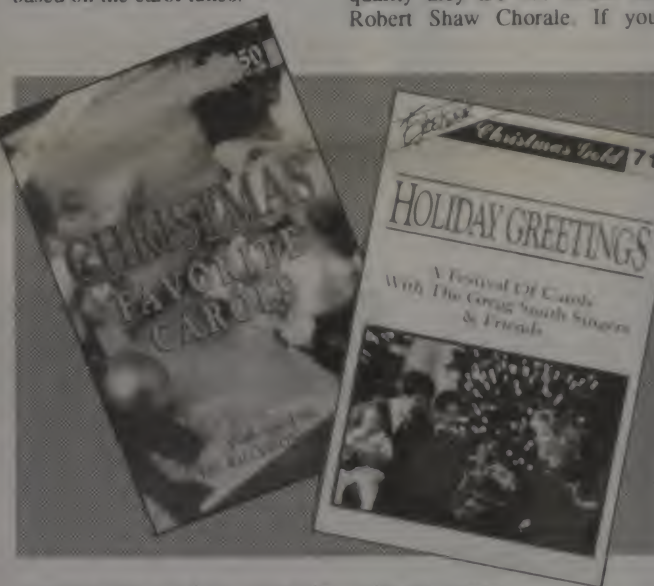
Delightful variety

A few carols are performed a cappella (unaccompanied). "How Brightly Shines the Morning Star," arranged with simple but sometimes unexpected harmonies, is particularly beautiful and effective sung a cappella.

Others are accompanied with one or more of the following: lute; guitar; recorder; winds; oboe, flute; strings; continuo cello, solo violin, various string ensembles; percussion; triangle, finger cymbals, tamborine, side drum, vibraphone, bells; organ, harpsichord, piano.

The only real drawback is that some of the carols are too short, with only a couple of verses performed instead of the three, four or more that make up most carols.

With the exception of "fun"



numbers like a bright, rhythmic arrangement of "Jolly Old St. Nick," the kids' number "The Cricket's Christmas," the old stand-by "Deck the Halls" and the romantic "The Most Wonderful Day of the Year," these are carols with Christian texts.

A few are revelations, some because they will be new to most listeners, others because of unusual and inventive settings.

A different approach

One of the latter is "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Undoubtedly you've likely never heard it like this.

A fast drum beat begins; a few measures later the basses begin Verse 1, about twice as fast as one is used to hearing it. At the refrain the tenors join an octave higher, singing in unison

with the basses.

On Verse 2, the boys sing in unison; the men sing the refrain in harmony. Verse 3 adds tamborine and all voices in unison, with harmony on the refrain.

Verse 4 has the sopranos and altos sing the text, with rhythmic interpolations by the tenors and basses; the refrain's "Rejoice!" is sung by all in unison, and continues in parts.

The drum has continued throughout and its beat gradually gains intensity and then beats double time. On Verse 5 it, and the increased intensity of the singers, creates a kind of excited frenzy when the text speaks of God's majesty; it then gradually dies away.

The overall effect is a kind of exuberant, primitive, red-blooded (ironic pun intended)

exultation at the thought of the coming Savior. This setting seems a logical extrapolation of a piece which began life as a chant, albeit a contemplative chant, and this setting injects the carol with new life and new thought.

On a lighter note, even "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" gets a face lift, but on the slow end. It is performed in what might be called a lingering tempo, with warm harmonies. The result is a wistful, almost contemplative aura rather than the usual jolly, back-slapping kind of mood.

This recording was issued two years ago but should be available without much difficulty (I bought mine a couple of weeks ago). It's well worth hunting down, if necessary.

Season's Greetings



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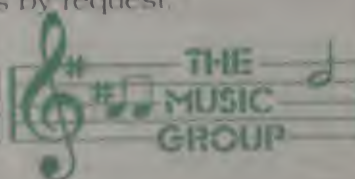
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ARTS & MEDIA

Star Trek: First Contact



Star Trek offers its own salvation

Marian Van Til

Rated PG. Stars Patrick Stewart, Jonathan Frakes, Brent Spiner, Gate McFaddon, Miriã Sirtis, Michael Dorn, LeVar Burton, Alfre Woodard, James Cromwell.

As Trekkers (not "Trekkies") already know, there is another *Star Trek* movie out, the second one featuring the TV cast of the 23rd century *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. This one is considerably better than the first, which included an aging, too-fat Captain Kirk in a convoluted plot presumably designed to be a bridge from the original show, cast and movies to "the next generation." Fortunately, in *First Contact*, there's nary a mention of Captain Kirk.

Parallel stories

The plot has two main thrusts: First, a flight back in time to 21st century Earth and a life-and-death struggle against the Borg. The Borg are the Federation of Planets' worst nightmare: part-machine, part-organic creatures who assimilate other species into their collective, stealing the best of the traits of those species.

Second, we follow a parallel course to an event on Earth in about 2060, initiated by a scientist named Zephram Cochran. A rocket which Cochran launches results in "first contact" with an alien species (that species is revealed in a pleasant little surprise at the end of the movie). The Borg, too, have reason to want to be there.

In the history of the Federation, of which our heroes and their ship, *The Enterprise*, are the focus, Cochran was the father of "warp drive," which enabled space vehicles to travel faster than light. James Cromwell (who played the farmer in *Babe*) gives a nicely understated performance as Cochran, a lonely scientist with a drinking problem and a love for ancient rock 'n' roll. He must compete with the myth that has grown up around him as a historical figure revered by the 23rd century *Enterprise* crew.

One problem with this and all *Star Trek* movies is that the

viewer always knows the crew will pull through (unless we don't know them, in which case they may be expendable). Our friends in the crew, after all, need to be around for another day — and another movie. That precludes any tragedy involving characters to whom viewers have emotional attachments. (The only exception was Spock's death in a previous movie. But even he came back — apparently Vulcans can do that.) Thus these movies tend to be more like extended television programs without commercials than like normal feature-length films.

Though *First Contact* doesn't suffer from the technology fixation of some earlier *Trek* movies, there isn't enough depth of focus on the personalities of the crew we've come to know and like from the TV series.

Over time, TV's *Next Generation* did an excellent job of developing relatively complex personalities for Captain Picard, First Officer Will Riker, counsellor Troi, head engineer Geordi, Dr. Crusher, Data the android and Worf the Klingon security chief. But unfortunately, the film doesn't forge much new territory in that regard.

Picard's psyche not tapped

There are interesting allusions to Picard's own experience of near-assimilation by the Borg (which happened on the TV series), and to how that may be affecting his decision-making regarding engaging them in battle. But a potentially fascinating relationship (not necessarily romantic) between Picard and a 21st century woman (Alfre Woodard) who is a friend of Cochran's is not explored as it might have been. Patrick Stewart as Picard, however, does a lot with a little material.

A subplot involving the Borg's attempt to assimilate Data is used to slightly better advantage. On the whole, Jonathan Frakes (Commander Riker) directs the film with a sure hand, plays up the occasional subtle wit, and doesn't allow the film to take itself too seriously.

Let's face it; this film exists

for *Star Trek* fans, though background is provided for the uninitiated. However, *Star Trek* fans number in the tens of millions in North America alone, and most of them are bound to be drawn to any *Trek* film that comes out. Those with no interest in either *Star Trek* or science fiction won't see the film. But that still leaves a very large audience.

Why the ongoing interest?

If you're not in on this phenomenon you might wonder why a 1967 TV series, its three successors and eight related films should maintain so many people's ongoing interest.

A general fascination with space exploration and the potential for discovering life elsewhere is undoubtedly part of the story. But so are the diverse casts of characters and their problems. Whatever the supposed species involved, these stories explore human problems and interactions, ranging from personal relationships to our own current social problems.

The stories focus on a community (crew) of people working unselfishly for their common good and a common goal, an ability which seems more and more rare in our time. Yet *Star Trek* takes an unfailingly sunny (and unrealistic) view of human potential and humankind's ability to overcome evil (no total depravity here!), and its optimism is contagious.

People yearn for a better world (we Christians would say we know why); they would like to believe that the human race will improve on itself someday soon, and will be saved from racial, gender and social tensions, poverty, hunger and most else that ails us. The *Star Trek* characters fulfill that longing for salvation, at least in some people's fantasies. Maybe that's why these movies always come out at Christmas time.

If you don't buy that, the *Star Trek* genre simply tells good stories: always interesting, often exciting, sometimes touching, even deeply so — and *First Contact* is one of those stories.

Chatham choir to present Messiah for the 30th time



The Laudate Dominum Choir

Marian Van Til

ANCASTER, Ont. — Thirty years of a good thing calls for some kind of celebration. Perhaps an evening out, say, to a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. In this case it is the performance itself which has occurred for 30 years, presented each December by the Laudate Dominum Choir of Chatham, Ont.

The 50-voice choir is slightly older. It was formed 35 years ago in 1961 by John Postma.

Postma retired as director in 1987 and was replaced by current director Barbara Mavin. Postma, however, couldn't quite give up the choir; for the last nine years he has been a member of the tenor section.

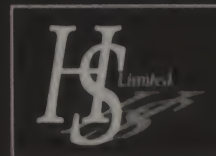
This year's *Messiah* performance will be held at Redeemer College, in Ancaster, Ont., on Dec. 15 with organist Jan Over-

duin accompanying. Overduin is a professor of music at the University of Waterloo. The choir will be joined by the 70-voice concert choir of Chatham Christian High School (the school celebrated its own 25th anniversary last year and its choir produced a compact disk to mark the occasion).

Laudate Dominum president Harry Roffel says his choir is excited about this year's performance, its third at Redeemer but its first with Chatham's high school choir and with Jan Overduin accompanying. "We're really looking forward to it," says Roffel.

Laudate Dominum is a Christian community choir which presents three or four classical music concerts a year in southern Ontario.

(See CC's Calendar of Events for *Messiah* details.)



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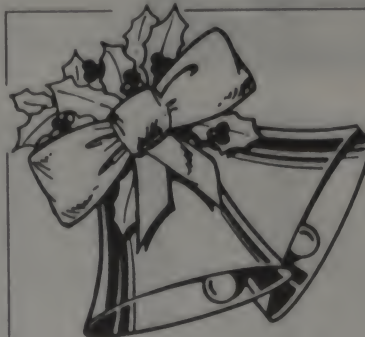
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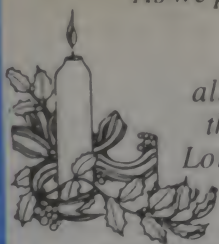
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*May your Christmas be
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with family love,
Warm
with friendship,
Happy
with life's goodness,
And blessed
with God's care.*

The following residents of Shalom Manor have requested that their names be included into the 1996 Christmas Greetings edition of *Christian Courier*.



The Staff and National Board of the Christian Labour Association of Canada wish all friends and members a blessed Christmas and peace and happiness throughout the coming year.



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Christmas vision

Jan Ford

I bowed my head against the invading Canadian winds and knocked on Rosa's door. My hand trembled, not from the cold but from the reception I might receive. Northerly gusts struggled to lift the soggy muck from the gutter. Two months before, the debris had been brilliant gold leaves. Two months before, Rosa could see. Perhaps spinning autumn colors had been the last image she'd seen when my car skidded off the road in October.

Halting footsteps approached. The front door opened a crack. I wished I'd brought her Christmas gift with me. What made me think she'd give me a second chance?

Rosa's sightless gaze went through me to some dark point beyond.

"Rosa, it's —"

She cut me off. "Julie?"

"Yes."

She retreated a step. "Carol told me you were back in Dubuque."

"Rosa, I'm sorry."

She turned away from me, but didn't open the door.

I swallowed hard. "I heard you're making progress. Congratulations."

She didn't answer. My mind flew, searching for some safe ground. "Are you ready for Christmas? Are the girls having you over for the holidays?"

"I can't very well cook for everyone here." The bitterness in her voice made me cringe. I needed a connecting point. The wind whistled around her porch.

"They're forecasting snow. Remember how we used to look forward to that? Well, you did, anyway. It'll be a white Christmas this year."

Rosa dropped her blank gaze. She opened and closed her mouth, struggling with herself and against me. Her voice cracked. "Julie, I'm never going to see the blizzard again."

Blizzard — that had been her word. Every time the heavens released more than ten flakes, she'd shout, "It's a blizzard!" We'd stop working and watch, just the two of us, alone in nature's art gallery. Begrudgingly, I'd admit there was beauty, but I'd worry about driving in it. Rosa never worried. The chal-

lenge became part of the appeal.

Later, when I had transferred to another department, our friendship persisted. On winter days she'd sometimes stop by the office and we'd take time to watch the snow and plan our future. I'd say, "I'm going to retire to northern Minnesota and write poetry."

"You? Ha! This I've got to see. I'll come with you and clean your house. You weren't any good at it anyway."

I'd ignored her teasing. "And listen to my poetry while I read it?"

"Do I have to?"

"You said you liked it."

"I lied."

She was my guinea pig for my feeble poetic attempts. She'd give encouragement, but more than that, her dreamy look told me she enjoyed the rhythm of the words. She had been my special audience, the type few "weekend" poets find.

Standing outside her house, I took Rosa's hand. "You may not be able to see the snow, but you can still taste it. When it starts, run outside and open your mouth."

"Yuck. That dirty snow?" She drew back, as if withdrawing from life.

I put my hand out to stop her before she closed the door. "I'll come back tomorrow morning. I'll show you the snow. It'll be my Christmas present to you."

Before dawn I knocked at her door. I knew she'd be up. We were both early risers. Although she hadn't greeted me, she didn't protest when I slipped her arms into her coat, not unlike an old woman who had given up voluntary action and did only as others ordered.

"We're going out to the bluff," I said, leading her down the stairs.

She jerked her arm away. "I can find my own steps."

I took a deep breath, repeating what I'd rehearsed on the drive to her house. "The first flakes are coming. They're the scouts, floating down from the heavenly warships. They're almost invisible."

"Everything's invisible to me."

Why had I chosen sight



words?

She held out her hand at the bottom of the steps waiting mutely for my assistance.

I pulled her gloved hand through the crook of my arm and led her to the car.

"The scouts can only be seen against the black truck parked across the street." I cringed. There I'd gone again forcing pictures on her when she couldn't see. Anyone could tell her what happened when it snowed. I wanted to give her more.

My mind raced, frantically looking for poetry. It found none. I plunged through the heavy silence between us. "Did you know those quiet vanguards send telepathic messages back to their grand army? They say 'It's too warm. Wait. Wait. Wait.'" My voice trailed off to a whisper while I fastened her seat belt.

We pulled into the morning traffic and headed toward the Mississippi River. I worried about driving with Rosa, about her trusting me again. But I had promised her special visions. Had she forgiven me? I was afraid to ask.

I turned the corner, gunning the car to make it up the steep hills above Dubuque's downtown area. "It's snowing heavier. Some regiments didn't get the message. Their communication system broke down.

Or maybe some headstrong general defied orders and ignored scouting reports. They're teasing us, flying in swirls, scooping and diving in the air, like daredevil bombers. They're dying, melting into the earth. But those suicidal flakes had a majestic life."

Rosa's shallow breathing betrayed her tension. I parked the car on the highest bluff where bare trees broke the dull stability of the granite and steel downtown buildings below us. Victorian houses lined our backs. I thought of telling Rosa this, but instead I let the battle analogies take over my mind.

"More scouts are marching in. Can you hear them? They're saying, 'It's better. We could attack — with caution and stealth.' Hear them?"

We waited. Except for the ice tapping on our haven, the world was without a whisper.

Gradually white flurries filled the air. "They're small and harmless. Come on." I undid Rosa's seat belt and urged her from the car. I pulled off her gloves. "Feel."

Bits of frozen moisture melted on her hand.

Cracks in the sidewalk filled, forming white lines on the gray. Gusts whistled over the streets. I tried to sound dramatic. "The

wind's catching the tiny infantry, sweeping it to the curb. The cars are crushing the ones nearest the front lines, in the no-man's-land. But those behind the lines are building up, preparing for the onslaught."

I caught a hint of a smile on Rosa's lips. She resisted me when I tried to pull her back into the car, but within minutes the cold won out. I ran the heater long enough to break through the chill. Outside, the world slowly turned white.

"The main force has arrived — giant, war-weary flakes. They've fought battle after battle, only to die and be reincarnated to fight again. And die again. But this time they'll fight and stay."

"They're that powerful?" she whispered.

"Rosa, those flakes have the power to take over the town en masse. They can close the schools and make children sing. They can force motorists off the highway." I bit my lip. That image had hit too close for me. I raced on. "They have the power to bring the whole city to its knees. There are awesome spirits inside those battalions. Who could fight against them, once they decide to win?"

We listened to the soft pelting of the icy snow on the windshield. Occasionally I ran the motor, sorry to interrupt the faint tappings. We munched chocolate doughnuts and drank coffee from a thermos. While the hours passed traffic slowed below us. The weather wimps, who didn't have to be out, stayed in.

"What's happening now?" Rosa asked after I'd been quiet for some time.

The emerging sunlight glittered on soft mounds. "They've besieged us with diamonds and pearls."

"The town surrendered?"

"Yes," I said. Incredibly, Rosa had opened my eyes to her blizzard's glory.

"I wonder if the town resents being a captive of nature?" I asked.

Rosa opened the car door. "I don't. Not anymore."

I held her back. "Rosa, I'm sorry."

"I know." She squeezed my hand. "Of all the gifts you've ever given me, the blizzard's the best. Now, I'm going to watch it snow." Stepping into the drifts, she tilted her face upward and opened her mouth. Ice crystals kissed her tongue.

Janet F. Ford is a freelance writer who lives in Dubuque, Iowa.

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—Luke 2:10-11.



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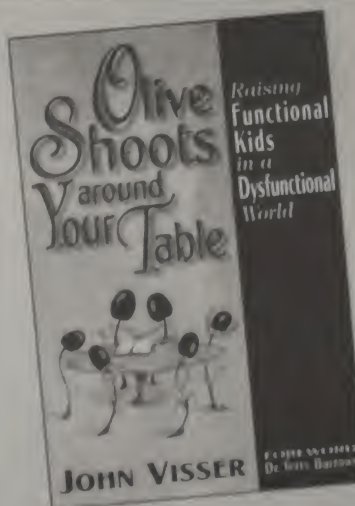
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Chapter & Verse



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Andrew Kuyvenhoven

The best known Bible text is John 3:16. That's because this verse presents the gospel in a nutshell. Every Christian over 10 years old should know it by heart.

God so loved. The love of God is the source of all good things and the origin of our salvation. His love is directed to *the world*. We may not make that any smaller than the text. We may not limit his love to our group, our church or our nation, because the object of his love is the world. And world means (in this case) all of humanity.



We know that not all of the world will be saved, but that is not God's fault.

God so loved that he gave. Love always makes one give. Perhaps one can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving. To give is to share in love.

What is the measure of God's love? (Lovers always want to say how much they love; I tell my granddaughter that I love her a ton, and she says she loves me oodles.) God loved so much *that he gave his one and only Son*. The old-fashioned and more familiar word is "only begotten" Son, a literal translation of the Greek. "One and only" Son is a translation according to mean-

ing. The expression emphasizes the preciousness of the Gift.

God's overwhelming love is directed to the world and expressed in the gift of his Son. In the child of Bethlehem, God shows us that he loves us and how much he loves us.

Never forget that the only real evidence of God's love for humanity is found in the manger and the cross of Jesus. Otherwise, sooner or later, you will run badly stuck.

The church says that God created the world, and some people have difficulty with that. The church says that God rules the world too. But there is less evidence that God rules the world than that he has created it. Then the church says that God loves the world. But everywhere we meet cruelty, pain and poverty, suffering and death. But the love of God has been revealed in the giving of the Son. Both the fact and the measure of his love are in Jesus.

The intended result of God's giving of his Son is: *that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*. To die without God is to perish. It is the natural course of the world and of all people to perish. We belong to a sinful and dying race. The road of our race is the way of perdition. Now God gives his Son to the world as the only way out, so to speak. Through Jesus, God brings light in darkness, life in deadness. "Whoever believes in him" will share in the imperishable life of God instead of the perishable lot of people.

Verse 17: *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him*. He came not to judge, as one might

God's extravagant Gift demands a response

have expected, but to save, which is the surprise of the gospel. It is God's serious business to save the world. How serious he is, appears in the gift of the Son. Therefore, between Christmas and until Christ returns, our work is not to condemn but to reveal love. All church action and all Christian action must be aimed at saving the world. Only then, Christian action agrees with God's act.

People say mean things about God. They tell slanderous stories about him. They even say that he kills innocent, or at least ignorant, people. They say he throws babies into hell. But they are lying. They don't know the religious reality. God brings life into the world which is a place of death. There is no life here according to the worldview of John 3:16-18. But the good God sent Jesus to save the world.

John 3:18: *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he (or she) has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. God has come to us by the gift of his Son. Jesus is the only way to life, the only door God has opened. Whoever refuses to go through this door remains in the prison of death and decay.*

Now it is the responsibility of

all people, of you and me and everyone, to believe. God has given his Son; now we may have him, so to speak. We must accept this love, his sacrifice and be saved by Jesus Christ.

The worst way to offend someone this Christmas is by refusing a gift that someone has lovingly prepared for you. The worst way people of this world offend the Ruler of the cosmos is by refusing his love, his heart, his Son.

Christmas 1996 increases the serious responsibilities of everyone to believe in the Son. It is very urgent that you and I and everyone repent and believe in Jesus. The urgency arises not only from the fact that we are mortal beings (we don't know if we will still be around next Christmas), but the matter is so urgent because it is *God* who is calling us. The great God of heaven and earth comes and calls us, by the gospel, to come back home, to himself. He who has all the stars of heaven at his fingertips, who knows all the secrets of the universe and lets us in on a few of them — it is he who so loved us that he gave us his Son. He gave him to the manger and to be murdered. And the place of the murder, the hill of Golgotha he made the centre of history. From there he stretches out his hands to the

whole cosmos. It is mine, he says. I made it; I loved it; I bought it.

When this great God comes to us not only to save our lives but also to have us stand with him and join him in saving the world, you and I must not refuse. When he calls "softly



and tenderly" but also firmly and emphatically, how does anyone dare make him wait?

The love story of Christmas is a matter of life or death. If you spurn such love and turn your back on such a God you continue in death. But whoever believes will live forever.

Andrew Kuyvenhoven was a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church and editor of *The Banner*. He is now retired and lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

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in darkness have seen
a great light; on those
living in the land of the
shadow of death a light
has dawned."
(Isaiah 9:2)*

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710 Mrs. Corrie Korstanje
705 Mrs. Tine Van Houten

Floor 6

615 Mrs. E. Karreman
610 Henk and Coby Spoelder
604 Mrs. H. Damm

Floor 5

514 Mrs. J. Hamstra
513 Jack and Rie Moerkerken
510 Zwier and Ann Adriaanse
505 De Ten Haaf
503 Mrs. Janny Huisjes

Floor 4

413 John and Gerda
van der Pol
410 Mrs. Truus Bakker
409 Mrs. N. Los
405 Mr. and Mrs. H. Warman

Floor 3

314 Mrs. O. Duiker
310 Mrs. M. Tensen
306 Mr. Harry Mulder
304 Mr. and Mrs. T. Ennema
301 Jacob Koetsier

Floor 2

214 Mr. Walter Horlings
213 Mrs. G. Bouman
212 Edziena Monster

Floor 1

104 Frank and Grace Lok
102 Johanna Bouwers



Providence

Floor 13

1305 Mr. and Mrs. E. Dobson

Floor 12

1209 Maarten and Vicky Heidinga

Floor 9

909 Mrs. L. Namink

Floor 8

806 Mr. A. Dekker

Floor 7

701 Harry and Wilma Smedes

Floor 6

608 Hank and Lammy Wiersema
606 Mr. C. Meeuwse
603 Mrs. Trudy Oosterhof

Floor 5

507 Joseph and Gera Olders
506 Mrs. S. Van Houten
502 Sybrand and Willy Koole
501 Jelle and Greta Hamstra

Floor 3

305 Jacob and Tieny Den Otter
304 Mr. J. v.d. Heide
301 Mr. Isaac Tange

Trinity

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618 Mrs. N. Triemstra
612 Mrs. Ge Pypker

Floor 5

517 Mr. G. Tebrake
516 Mr. and Mrs. H. Storteboom
508 Mrs. A. Zandstra
506 Mr. and Mrs. E. Reinders

Floor 4

415 Mr. and Mrs. J. and Ge
Mulder-Hunnerson
414 Mrs. A. Posthumus-Bijker
412 Mrs. K. Jansma
408 Mrs. Grace Sliemers
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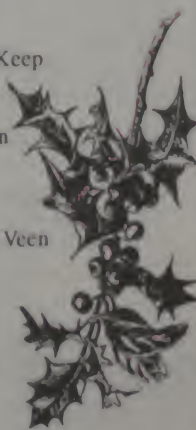
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214 Mrs. Grace Meyer
213 Mrs. Jannie Bult
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208 Mrs. Sandra
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109 Mrs. J. Grasman
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1201 Mrs. F. Martens

Floor 11

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1106 Hilly Westerhof
1102 L. and C. Van Rooyen
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Floor 10

1008 Mrs. Florence Giliam
1003 Mrs. Willemina
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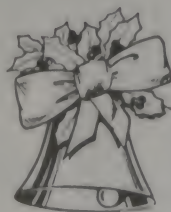
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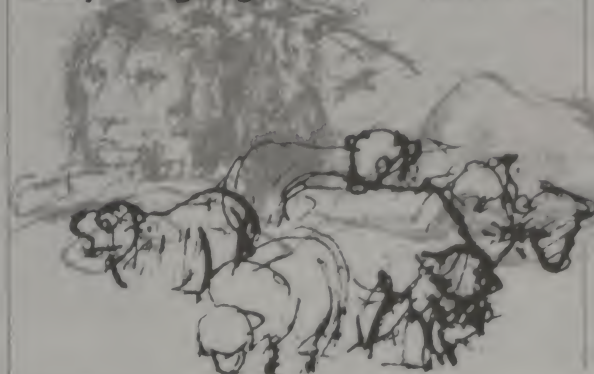


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**The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with
the kid, the calf and the lion and
the fatling together...** Isaiah 11.6a

The faculty,
students, and
staff of ICS
wish you the
peace of
Christ this
coming
season and
in the year
to come...



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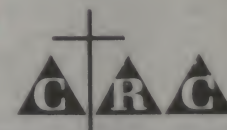


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	<p>Births</p> <p>ZANTINGH:</p> <p>"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" (Ps 107:1a)</p> <p>Rick and Willy Zantingh of Dunnville, Ont., joyfully announce the birth of their six grandchildren</p> <p>HANNA VICTORIA January 15, 1996 fifth child for Gerald and Sonya Tebrake</p> <p>ASHLEY MARIE March 27, 1996 second child for Alex and Cynthia Buist</p> <p>ESTHER YVONNE June 24, 1996 sixth child for Ken and Nancy Zantingh</p> <p>SCOTT RILEY July 19, 1996 first child for Eric and Joanne DeKorte</p> <p>JOSEPH BRADLEY October 4, 1996 second child for Chris and Monica Zantingh</p> <p>AARON RICHARD November 5, 1996 third child for Bruce and Liz Zantingh.</p> <p>Great-grandchildren for Wilfred and Christine Sjaarda of Shalom Manor, Grimsby, Ont. <i>In early days their hearts secure, from worldly snares we pray, O let them to the end endure, in every righteous way.</i></p>	<p>Hamilton York 1951 December 14 1996</p> <p>With praise and thanksgiving to God, we hope to celebrate the 45th anniversary of our parents</p> <p>BILL and MARIJKE BOONSTRA (nee VEENSTRA)</p> <p>May God continue to bless them richly in their life together.</p> <p>With love from, Jane & Rudy Ouweland Rebecca, Deb, Rob, Daniel Greta & Peter Goodwin Benji, Jeremy, Angela Al & Gail Boonstra Christie, Sarah, Rosalie, Charlie, Tim Dave & Julie Boonstra Kathy Boonstra</p> <p>You are invited to an open house to be held on Saturday, Dec. 14, 1996, at the Christian Education building behind the York Chr. Ref. Church. Home address: 312 York Road, Caledonia, ON N3W 2C5</p>	<p>1937 1996</p> <p>Stadskanaal, Gr. Hamilton, Ont.</p> <p>With joy and thanksgiving to the Lord we hope to celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents</p> <p>JURJEN and JURRIENA HARTMAN (nee DIJKHUIS)</p> <p>"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Rom. 12:12)</p> <p>May the Lord continue to bless you in the years to come. Love and best wishes from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.</p> <p>There will be an open house, D.V., on Saturday, Jan. 4, 1997, from 2:30 to 5 p.m. in the Commons Room of the Wellington Christian Home in Hamilton, Ont.</p> <p>Best wishes only please. Address: Wellington Chr. Home, #115-1415 Upper Wellington Str., Hamilton, ON L9A 5E8</p>	<p>1946 December 17 1996</p> <p>With joy and thankfulness to the Lord, we announce the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents</p> <p>CLARENCE and JESSIE TERPSTRA</p> <p>"For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death" (Ps 48:15).</p> <p>We pray and trust that our heavenly Father will continue to guide and keep them in His loving care. With love from your children and grandchildren</p> <p>Helen & Ted Postma — Burlington, Ont. Jason & Teresa, Kelly, Matt Metteke & Jack Vandenbout — Newark, N.Y. Adrian, Ashley, Jared Pete & Hennie Terpstra — Wellandport, Ont. Melissa, Sherri, Ryan, Kevin John & Alison Terpstra — Niagara Falls, Ont. Janine, Kristen, Lindsay, Mark Andy & Yvonne Terpstra — St. Catharines, Ont. Rob, David, Travis</p> <p>You are invited to join us in celebrating this joyous occasion at an open house on Saturday, Dec. 14, 1996, the Lord willing, from 2-4 p.m. at the Rehoboth (Niagara Falls) Chr. Ref. Church, 4878 Japson St. Your presence is our gift!</p> <p>Home address: 779 Queenston Rd., R.R. #4, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON L0S 1J0</p>
	<p>Marriages</p> <p>WINKEL and STUIVE</p> <p>BEVERLY and DAVID</p> <p>The children God has entrusted to us, have together with the Lord, reached a decision to unite their lives as one with Him, knowing that their love and future are in His hands. They will celebrate this with the exchanging of their vows on Saturday, December 28, 1996, at Burnaby Chr. Ref. Church in Burnaby, B.C.</p> <p>Cathryn and Gerard Winkel, Burnaby, B.C. Harmina and Wiebrand Stuiwe, Wintona, Ont. Address: Box 788 Houston, BC V0J 1Z0</p>	 <p>1956 December 1996</p> <p>With joy and thankfulness we announce the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents</p> <p>TON and TEA VAN NES (nee ZEYL)</p> <p>Thank you for being wonderful, loving parents and grandparents. May God continue to bless you for many more years.</p> <p>With love, Wendy & Richard Abma — Calgary, Alta. Nico, Karin, Hannah, Luke, Marya Hilde & John Craig — Pitt Meadows, B.C. Joshua, Halaal, Nicola, Matthew, Jonathan Carol Ann & Brian Hiemstra — London, Ont. Benjamin, Wyatt, Axel Address: 15 Withrow Ave., Nepean, ON K2G 2H7</p>	<p>Obituaries</p> <p>Soest, the Neth. Ottawa, Ont. July 7, 1917 - Nov. 22, 1996 John 14: 1-3, 18-19, 27. Suddenly on Friday, Nov. 22, 1996, the Lord called unto Himself</p> <p>DIRK HOOLWERF</p> <p>in his 80th year. Beloved husband of Jetskina (nee Wubs). Dear father of Joyce (John DeWilde) — Holland Landing, Ont. Bert Hoolwerf (Rita) — Ottawa, Ont. He will be lovingly remembered by his nine grandchildren.</p> <p>Funeral service was held at Calvin Chr. Ref. Church, Nepean, Ont., on Monday, Nov. 25, 1996, Rev. Ken Gehrels officiating.</p> <p>Correspondence address: Mrs. J. Hoolwerf, 220 Viewmount Dr., Apt. 206, Nepean, ON K2E 7M5</p>	
<p>Births</p> <p>DYKSTRA:</p> <p>"...give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations" (Ps 100:4b,5).</p> <p>Phillip and Denise, along with David, Brianne and Laura, are very pleased to announce the arrival of their gift from God</p> <p>JOSEPH WILLIAM born on Nov. 2, 1996, weighing 8 lbs., 10 oz. Proud grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Mike and Helen Dykstra of Clinton, Ont., and Mr. and Mrs. Ed and Willie Grootenboer of Brampton, Ont.</p>				

Classifieds

Christmas Greetings	Church News	Miscellaneous	Job Opportunities
<p>POSTHUMUS: We wish all our family, friends and neighbors a very Blessed Christmas and a happy New Year. Andy and Hermina Posthumus, 155 4th Avenue W., Apt. 205, Owen Sound, ON N4K 6W4</p>	<p>Christian Reformed Church</p> <p>Change in time of services: — The Ingersoll, Ont., CRC, will hold their evening service at 4:30 p.m., during eastern standard time, and at 7 p.m., during eastern daylight savings time. The morning service remains at 10 a.m.</p>	<p>"Zeg Het Met Een Bloemetje"</p> <p>The Tulip Tie</p> <p>Beautiful Red Tulips from an actual picture taken by Geek Zwetsloot have been reproduced on a micro-fibre tie.</p> <p>The Tulip Tie makes a great Christmas gift or conversation item.</p> <p>To order send \$29.95 to VANDERLAAN'S c/o 31 Miller Dr., Ancaster, ON L9G 2H9 Visa orders can be sent by fax to (905) 648-6071 or call us at (905) 648-3170.</p> <p>Also available the "Komt Nu Met Zang" Dutch Song service from Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ont. Order both the cassette from 1994 and 1996 for \$21.00.</p> <p>T-shirt printed with the words and music of "Frysk bloed sjoch op!" etc. Available in sizes M, L, XL, and XXL. Only \$18.95 ea.</p> <p>Above prices include shipping/taxes/handling etc. Please specify the items and units required. Please enclose cheque or money order.</p>	<p>Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a 13-partner Canadian-based Christian organization that facilitates the distribution of food and development assistance to hungry people throughout the world, is currently seeking to fill the following positions:</p>
<p>Miscellaneous</p> <p><i>Give a gift of gratitude.</i></p> <p>Write your life story and acknowledge God's guidance. "History that isn't remembered tends to repeat itself." We do Dutch translation, interviewing, editing, publishing. Many references. Contact Nandy Heule at (905) 461-8916.</p>	<p>Meetings of classis: — Classis Niagara will meet in regular session, D.V., on Wednesday, Jan. 15, 1997, at 9 a.m., at the Bethany CRC, in Fenwick, Ont. Items to be included in the printed agenda should be available to the stated clerk no later than Dec. 6, 1996. John TeBrake, S.C. E-mail: john.tebrake@sympatico.ca or Regular mail: P.O. Box 985, Fonthill, ON L0S 1E0</p> <p>— Classis Quinte will meet in regular session on Tuesday, Jan. 28, 1997, at 9:30 a.m., in the Ebenezer CRC of Trenton, Ont. The deadline for all agenda materials is Monday, Dec. 9, 1996, at 6 p.m. Irene C. Bakker, Stated Clerk.</p>	<p>Eligible for call:</p> <p>— Following a Colloquium Doctum, Classis Alberta North decided, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies, to make Rev. Woon Chull Young eligible for call in our denomination. Rev. Woon Young is the pastor of the Edmonton Korean Mission Church. St. Albert CRC called Rev. Woon Young as its associate pastor with the mandate to prepare the Korean church for admission to the CRC. Nicholas B. Knoppers, Stated Clerk.</p>	<p>PROJECT ADVISOR Asmara, Eritrea</p> <p>As part of a three-year consultancy partnership with the Canadian Government, we require a person to oversee and provide technical assistance to the Eritrean Grain Board to strengthen its capacity to administer food reserve programs, monitor food markets and manage food aid monetization. This position is also responsible for working with the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission to enhance its capacity to collect, analyze and use information to ensure adequate food for all of Eritrea's citizens.</p> <p>Qualifications: University graduate with strong understanding of survey methods, grain markets and food security issues. Must also possess strong administrative skills and project management experience. Overseas experience is desirable.</p>
<p>Personal</p> <p>Single male, 5'6", 150 lbs., likes to meet Christian lady, 50-65, who likes country living, St. Catharines/Hamilton area. Please send letters to File #2657, c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1.</p>	<p>ONE TO ANOTHER</p> <p>Christian companion magazine. Hundreds of readers Canada-wide. Single issue \$5. Write to: #302, 1502-2nd Ave. S. Lethbridge, AB T1J 4A2</p>	<p>Interested in placing an ad? Get in touch with us for details.</p>	<p>GREAT LAKES REPRESENTATIVE Nairobi, Kenya</p> <p>The position of Great Lakes Representative is responsible for emergency food initiatives carried out by Canadian Foodgrains Bank in Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire. This position is responsible for program planning, logistics management, monitoring projects and conducting impact assessments in an unstable, but challenging work environment.</p> <p>Qualifications: University graduate with strong interpersonal skills, good networking abilities and an understanding of food aid issues. Good facilitation and administrative skills are also required. This position involves considerable travel. The ideal candidate will also be bilingual.</p> <p>Resumes for either of these two positions should be submitted by January 15, 1997, to:</p> <p>Canadian Foodgrains Bank 400-280 Smith Street P.O. Box 767 Winnipeg, MB R3C 2L4</p>
<p>Caregiving Needed</p> <p>Host family required for wheelchair-bound mom and healthy four-month-old baby (longterm). Respite and support services will be available. Caregiver will be financially compensated. If interested, please call Rehoboth Home, Springfield, Ont., (519) 765-4207, for more information.</p>	<p>Vacations</p> <p>GOING TO HOLLAND FOR VACATION? Why not rent a VACATION APARTMENT and visit family and sight-see at your leisure. CENTRALLY LOCATED near APELDOORN. Year-round accommodations. FOR BROCHURE OR MORE INFORMATION CALL Harold or Nellie at (905) 985-7891 or fax us at (905) 985-0195.</p>	<p>Miscellaneous</p>	<p>COUPON</p> <p>Make someone a subscriber and treat yourself.</p> <p>This is the time to subscribe to North America's only Reformed weekly newspaper. If you become a subscriber, or gain a new subscription for us, we will reward you by sending each of you a copy of Rev. Henry Van Andel's <i>Building on the Rock: Meditations on the Sermon on the Mount</i>.</p> <p>Send this coupon to us and enclose a cheque for \$43.50 (or \$35 US), payable to Christian Courier, for the following new subscriber:</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____ Town/City: _____ Code: _____</p> <p>Please also send the book to:</p> <p>Name (of present subscriber): _____</p> <p>Address: _____ Town/City: _____ Code: _____</p> <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This offer is not valid for subscription renewals. • Cheque/money-order must be enclosed with this coupon • Offer expires December 31, 1996.
	<p>Caregiving Needed</p> <p>Host family required for wheelchair-bound mom and healthy four-month-old baby (longterm). Respite and support services will be available. Caregiver will be financially compensated. If interested, please call Rehoboth Home, Springfield, Ont., (519) 765-4207, for more information.</p>	<p>SAVE MONEY BY USING OUR CLASSIFIEDS...</p>	<p>COUPON</p> <p>Make someone a subscriber and treat yourself.</p> <p>This is the time to subscribe to North America's only Reformed weekly newspaper. If you become a subscriber, or gain a new subscription for us, we will reward you by sending each of you a copy of Rev. Henry Van Andel's <i>Building on the Rock: Meditations on the Sermon on the Mount</i>.</p> <p>Send this coupon to us and enclose a cheque for \$43.50 (or \$35 US), payable to Christian Courier, for the following new subscriber:</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____ Town/City: _____ Code: _____</p> <p>Please also send the book to:</p> <p>Name (of present subscriber): _____</p> <p>Address: _____ Town/City: _____ Code: _____</p> <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This offer is not valid for subscription renewals. • Cheque/money-order must be enclosed with this coupon • Offer expires December 31, 1996. <p>Send to: Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1</p>

Classifieds

Teachers

THUNDER BAY, Ont.: Thunder Bay Chr. School requires a half-time teacher to fill maternity leave position from January to June 1997, to teach Grade 8/9 literature, Bible, creative writing. Send resume to:

Thunder Bay Chr. School
R.R. #2, Arthur St. W.
Thunder Bay, ON P7C 4V1
or
Fax (807) 939-2843

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Full-time employment needed on a well-established poultry/beef/cashcrop operation in Quinte area. Preferred some experience with laying poultry, but willing to train. If interested call Kirby or Arlene Hakkesteg at (613) 475-3532 or fax resume to (613) 475-5128. Position to start January 1, 1997.

Miscellaneous

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Job Opportunities

Thunder Bay Christian School
seeks

PRINCIPAL—ADMINISTRATOR
to begin August 1997

The school is SK-9, with 9 full-time staff, and 6 part-time. TBCS was founded in 1962 and by the grace of God has been blessed with continued growth. Present enrollment is 268.

This school adheres to the Reformed Creedal Standards. Compensation is based on O.A.C.S. administrator's grid. Picturesque Thunder Bay is situated along Lake Superior, serving a community of approximately 140,000, in the geographical centre of Canada.

Deadline for applications is January 15, 1997.

For further information contact,

Edward Breukelman, phone/fax (807) 475-6979 or
send application to:

Edward Breukelman

Search Committee

c/o Thunder Bay Christian School

R.R. #2, Arthur St. W., Thunder Bay, ON P7C 4V1

Job Opportunities

SEEKING A PASTOR

Horizon Community Church, a new CRC ministry of 100 families, is seeking a pastor. The church is located in the thriving suburban community of Highlands Ranch, a part of the **Denver Metropolitan area**. Key to the church's program is Bible-based dynamic preaching, enthusiastic worship, and sharing of the gospel in active outreach to a suburban community. Essential to the church's development is continued facilitation of the merging of two congregations and leadership for staff ministry. Please send inquiries and/or resumes to the **Search Committee**, Horizon Community Church, 7140 S. Colorado Blvd., Littleton, CO 80122.

Miscellaneous

Langley Christian Schools

invites applications for an

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

for K-5 Campus of 330+ students
and a possible

MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

for 6-8 level of 180 students.

LCS is a well-established interdenominational Christian school going through building and growth changes. We are in need of visionary, energetic, educational leaders who are able to function as part of a K-12 administrative team.

Please forward complete applications or direct enquiries to:

Leo Smit, Principal

21789-50th Avenue

Langley, BC V3A 3T2

Telephone: (604) 533-2222 or fax: (604) 533-7276.

VICE-PRINCIPAL NEEDED

Lacombe Chr. School, located in central Alberta, and serving a student body of 375 students, requires a Vice-Principal for the 1997-98 school year. Duties will include both teaching and administrative duties. Candidates must qualify for Alberta teacher certification. Please send inquiries and/or resumes to: **John Piers, Principal**, Lacombe Chr. School, 5206 - 58 Street, Lacombe, AB T4L 1G9.

Phone: (403) 782-6531 or Fax: (403) 782-5760.

Deadline for applications is January 15, 1997.

**THE GREATER WINNIPEG SOCIETY
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Calvin Chr. School offers a Christ-centred education to 357 students (K to 9) from various denominations in the Greater Winnipeg area. Applicants must qualify for Manitoba certification (60 hours minimum in education courses).

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Principal Search Committee

c/o Len Hordijk

425 Bonner Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2G 1B4

For further information call

(204) 338-7981

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Classifieds

Miscellaneous

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You can now reach *Christian Courier* via e-mail. This will make it convenient for those contributors and readers who are on the Internet to link up with us. You can contact Bert Witvoet at cceditor@aol.com and Marian Van Til at ccassoced@aol.com

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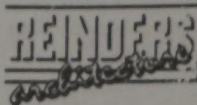
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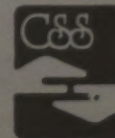
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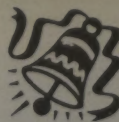
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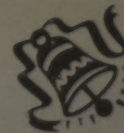
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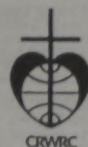
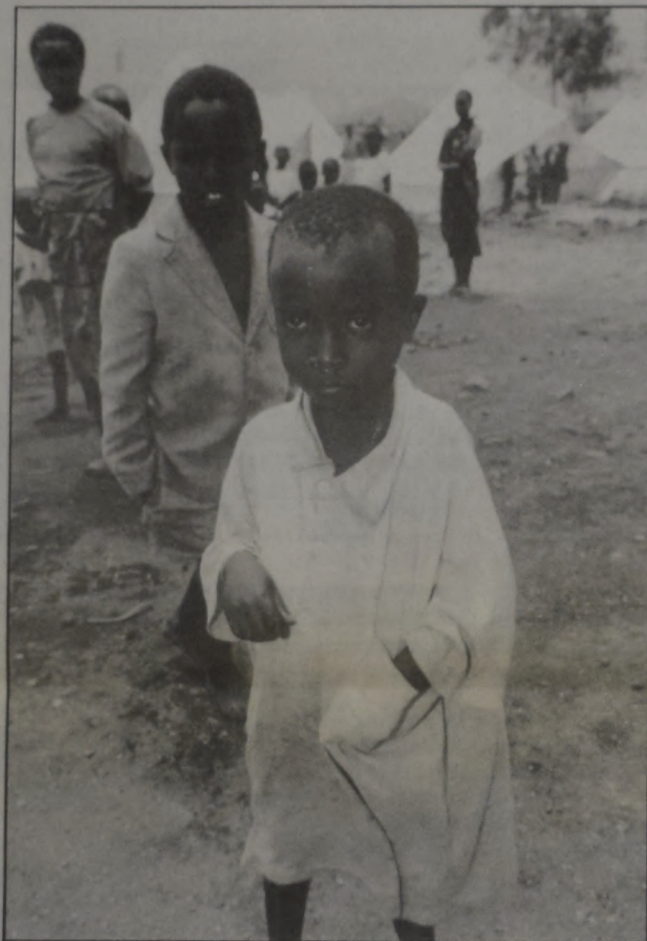
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URGENT! CRWRC NEWS UPDATE

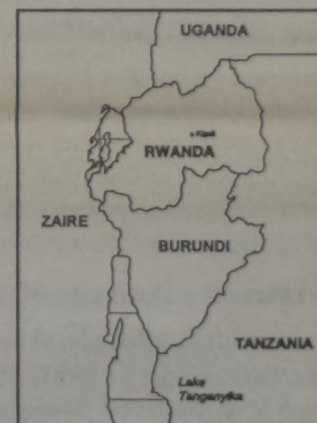


You CAN RESPOND to the Rwandan refugee crisis!

Your special Christmas gift can make a difference now!

CRWRC was there in '94. We're responding now. The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), with relief and development programs in more than 30 countries worldwide, has 35 years' experience in international crisis response. Our relief, rehabilitation, and reconciliation response to the 1994 Rwandan refugee crisis is well known and respected. We need your help to respond to the current needs of Rwandan refugees!

We're ready to go now. A CRWRC representative is already in nearby Burundi, where CRWRC has been supporting a long-term resettlement program. CRWRC staff in the region are planning for food relief, water provision, and sanitation measures. Volunteer workers will be placed as soon as



The Great Lakes Region of Central Africa

conditions allow. CRWRC's partnership with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank allows food distribution to refugees most in need. Canadian Foodgrains Bank staff have already visited the area to assess needs and develop possible responses for CRWRC and other groups.

We're working for long-term solutions, not the quick fix. We'll focus on Rwanda and Burundi and concentrate on helping refugees resettle and re-establish homes and livelihoods. This plan involves distribution of seeds and farming tools to help needy families provide their own food. CRWRC will also work with Christians in the region to bring reconciliation among warring groups, to help this region of Central Africa achieve long-term peace and stability.

We go where there is the most need and the least help. This often involves reaching the most vulnerable victims of a crisis.

Please fill out this coupon, and mail your Christmas gift without delay!

Yes! I want to respond to the needs of Rwandan refugees this Christmas.

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